HITTING vs. MISSING

WITH THE SHOTGUN

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(SHADOW)

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THE HAMMOND SYSTEM OF SHOOTING.

Mr. Hammond enjoys among his field companions the repute of being an unusually good shot, and one who is particularly successful in that most difficult branch of upland shooting, the pursuit of the ruffed grouse, or partridge. This prompted the suggestion that he should write down for others an exposition of the methods by which his skill was acquired. The result is this original manual of "Hitting vs. Missing." We term it original, because, as the chapters will show, the author was self-taught; the expedients and devices adopted and the forms of practice followed were his own. This then may be termed the Hammond system of shooting; and as it was successful in his own experience, the publishers are confident that, being here set forth simply and intelligibly, it will prove not less effective with others.

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CHAPTER I.

Choosing the Gun.

THERE is no outdoor sport that is so generally and ardently followed as is the pursuit of feathered game, and in none is the desire to excel more strongly implanted in the hearts of its devotees. In the practice of wing shooting there is a fascination most alluring to tyro as well as expert. How wonderful to the inexperienced is the skill of the wing shot, who with unerring aim brings down the swiftly flying, startled bird! What swelling pride fills the heart of the novice when his first bird falls to his well-directed aim! With what supreme happiness he gazes upon the well-rounded form of his beautiful prize, and as he fondly smoothes the glossy plumage and reviews the performance, his cup of happiness is full to overflowing.

As he declares to himself that there is no sport equal to this, and resolves that he will master its mysteries, visions of untold numbers of birds tumbling from their arrowy flight to his well-directed aim fill his imagination and surround him with a halo of happiness that hours or days of weary and fruitless tramping can never wholly dispel.

In trying to learn the art of shooting on the wing, the beginner usually has more or less trouble at the start from lack of proper instruction as to what he should or should not do; not that such instruction cannot be readily obtained for the mere asking; but the average boy, or man for that matter, when he gets his first gun is very prone to think that he knows about all that is worth knowing in relation to handling it, or even to loading it. Or, if he is conscious of his ignorance as to what is proper, his pride will often deter him from asking questions that would betray his ignorance upon the subject. In fact, it is a false pride of this sort that is one of the most besetting sins of sportsmen and would-be sportsmen, especially the latter, and is born of the desire to receive credit for better work than one's actual performance merits. As this volume is intended to benefit and instruct the beginner, I make early note of this trait in order that he may guard against it; for I assure him that, as a rule, he will meet very few shooters who will not quickly discover the false pride, and as quickly see and despise the false pretense.

In order to best carry out my intention to make this work really a help to the novice, we must begin with the first steps that he should take in order to thoroughly learn the art. I have confidence enough in those who may be more or less familiar with many of the minor details of shooting to believe that they will not begrudge their less well informed brethren the space devoted to matters with which they may themselves be well acquainted.

The very first and most important thing for the beginner to do is to procure a gun that exactly fits him. No matter what others may say, nor how much you may be pleased with the appearance of the gun, or how much you may admire the pattern, do not, upon any consideration, buy it unless it fits you. In order to determine this very essential point, it will be best for you to test it at actual work at a target, although you may reach a fairly correct conclusion by sighting the gun as I shall describe; but it is much the better way to give it a thorough trial, so that you may feel sure of what you can do with it, for no man can do his best with a gun that does not fit him. Experts, of course, can usually adapt themselves to almost any gun, but you will seldom find a good shot who uses a gun that does not hang just to suit him. You should therefore, when selecting your gun, see that it is well balanced. In other words, when you take it in your hands, with your shooting hand—right or left, as the case may be—grasping the stock just behind the guard, with your finger on the front trigger and your other hand lightly holding the stock in front of the hammers, in a natural position just where you want it, without giving a thought as to the proper position as defined by others, but just in the place that seems to you to be right—when you bring the gun to your shoulder, until you have it just right—then if the gun seems to feel all right and natural, with no awkwardness or unnatural heaviness at breech or muzzle, and somehow seems to hang easy and natural, it is well balanced for you. Your friend, with a different length of arm or different grasp, may tell you that he never saw a worse balanced gun; but in this matter you must be judge for yourself and listen to no advice that conflicts with your own opinion as to what suits you. When you find a gun that hangs to please you as you handle it, you should further test it by bringing it to your shoulder, holding it in a natural and easy manner, in nearly a horizontal position, to determine whether the stock is of the proper length from the front trigger to the shoulder, which will readily be seen; as, if too long, you will be obliged to straighten your arm too much in order to reach the trigger; or, on the other hand, if too short, the arm will be unnaturally bent. Neither of these things should be.

In manipulating your gun all your motions should be perfectly natural and free from constraint, and you must be very careful when making this test that your nerves are not strung up so that your position and all your motions, or any of them, are constrained or unnatural. Just take the gun in your hands as you would a stick and go through the evolutions in an easy and natural manner. If you cannot readily do this, you must practice it until you can, or I fear that you will not succeed in getting a gun that will please you when you come to try for a quick shot among the birds.

When you find a gun that hangs to suit you and has the right length of stock, there remains yet one more test, which is of more importance than all the rest if you hope ever to become an expert shot in cover. After you have become somewhat accustomed to handling the gun and can bring it to your shoulder holding it nearly horizontal in an easy and natural manner, you should select some small object that is fifteen to twenty yards distant, such as the sharp corner of the roof of a building, a letter on a sign, a knot on a tree, the top of a post, or anything similar that is at about the proper distance, and from a foot or two to ten feet higher than your head. Stand squarely facing it and fix your eyes upon it, keeping them both open. Do not make any attempt to squint, for in order to obtain the best results you must learn to shoot with both eyes open.

Now bring the gun to your shoulder, with both eyes steadfastly fixed upon the point selected, and when the gun is in position glance along the barrels and take note of the difference, if any, between the object fixed upon and the point to which the gun is directed. This will give you some idea as to whether the gun fits you or not, as a gun that fits you will be pointed directly at the object your eyes are fixed upon. This cannot be certainly determined, however, until you are perfectly satisfied that you are doing this in a natural manner, free from all nervousness or awkwardness. It is therefore best to practice this until you are satisfied with the result, taking care not to fit yourself to the gun if it should be much out of the way, as you will find that the nearer you come to obtaining a perfect fit, the nearer you will come to bringing down your birds when you make the trial.

When you find a gun that you think will suit you, do not purchase it until you have put it to the test of actual work at a target. To do this properly, I would advise that you load twenty or more shells with a light charge, say about two and one-half drams of powder and three-fourths of an ounce of shot. The recoil from this charge will not disturb you, and all you want of it is to show you just where you are shooting. Your first practice at a target should be for the purpose of determining whether your gun will shoot where it is aimed; in other words, to find out whether the line of sight and the line of fire are the same or not. Most guns are properly adjusted in this respect, but occasionally one will be found that will throw too high or low or to one side of the line of sight, owing to carelessness or lack of skill on the part of the workman when the gun was put together. The proper method to pursue in order to accurately demonstrate this is to fire the gun from a fixed rest, as very few even of the best shots can hold a gun steady enough to place the charge twice in precisely the same place. This in large measure is owing to the fact that the line of sight along the barrels of a shotgun is by no means a fine one, it not being necessary in ordinary practice. For the purpose of finding the exact line of fire, it is better that considerable pains be taken to secure a perfect aim, which can most certainly be obtained by using a fixed rest.

This can be readily made by taking a piece of plank or heavy board four or five feet in length and a foot in width, and firmly fastening it in a horizontal position about four feet from the ground. Drive four stakes firmly into the ground at the proper distance apart and nail across them narrow strips of board at the right height from the ground. Drive a few nails into the board to hold it in place; then, with a block four or five inches thick for the muzzle of the gun to lie on, your rest is complete.

When using this, your target should be about twenty-five yards distant, and adjusted at the proper height, which can be ascertained by placing the muzzle of the gun on the block with the butt resting on the board close to the end of it; then take a sight and place your target at an elevation that will bring the center of it about in the line of sight. A large sheet of newspaper will answer for your target, with a circular piece of dark paper three inches in diameter pinned in the center for a bull's-eye. This may be fastened to a tree, if one is near, or you can drive a couple of stakes into the ground and it may be fastened to these. When all is ready, place your gun in the position described and put your shoulder to the butt, holding the gun easily but firmly in position, and take accurate aim at the bull's-eye, and when you are sure of your mark press the trigger firmly and steadily without dodging or twisting the gun away from the mark. If the gun is properly adjusted and your aim was true, the bull's-eye will be in the center of the pattern. Should it, however, vary much from this position, you must continue the test, changing the target at each trial, until you are perfectly satisfied that the fault is in the gun and is not due to your carelessness or your nerves. In case your nerves are in the least unsteady when firing the gun, you should practice with powder only until you overcome it, as you cannot hope to do anything approaching good work until you are perfectly cool and steady.

When you find that the gun will shoot where it is aimed, and that your nerves are all right, you are ready for the final test to determine whether the gun fits you or not. To make this test properly it is better to have the target at quite an elevation, say eight to ten feet, or more if convenient, as nearly all your shooting will be considerably above the level, and at this angle you are less inclined to bend the neck forward than you are when shooting on or below a level. Use the same kind of target already described, and take your stand squarely facing it about twenty-five yards distant, and hold your gun in front of you with both hands in readiness to bring it to your shoulder; then, fixing both eyes upon the bull's-eye, keep them there steadfastly and bring the gun to your shoulder in a perfectly free and easy manner. Pull the trigger the instant the gun is in position, without the slightest attempt to take an aim, as you should not take your eyes from the bull's-eye until after the discharge of the gun. If you have been perfectly cool and handled the gun in a natural manner, you will undoubtedly find that the charge has struck very nearly in line with the bull's-eye, and if the gun fits you the bull's-eye will be near the center of the pattern. But should the charge be above it after four or five trials, and you feel sure that your test has been a perfectly fair one, and that the gun was held to your shoulder just as you will hold it when you get among the birds, you will find that the stock is too straight for you; but if the charge strikes too low there is too much crook. If there is any considerable variation in either direction it will be necessary to have the crook of the stock altered to suit you; but if the variation is slight enough to bring the bull's-eye inside the pattern you can in a short time, by practice, overcome this and fit yourself to the gun. It is much better, however, to find by exhaustive test just what you want, and then to have it. By starting in right your chance of success is much better than it will be if you have to overcome more than the ordinary difficulties that you will encounter in trying to master the science of wing shooting.

The quality and finish of your gun I shall leave entirely to your judgment, merely suggesting that, if you can afford the expense, you will never regret the outlay if you purchase a well-finished gun of good quality, while on the other hand a cheap-made gun with cheap material will be nearly certain to prove unsatisfactory.

When you obtain a gun that suits and fits you, stick to it until you have learned to shoot, as a change in the hang of gun, be it never so slight, may cause you no end of trouble that would perhaps scarcely be noticed were you an expert shot.

The first double gun that I owned was a six-pound 20-gauge, with 3¼-inch drop and 13½ inches from the front trigger to the center of butt plate. This was just as the gun came to me, and it fitted me very nearly, and every gun that I have since owned has been altered to just this pattern. I would not, however, fix this as a standard for any one except myself; but I do strongly advise that when you get a gun that fits you, you should stick to the pattern when you change for another gun. At the present time game is scarce, and you cannot afford many misses, especially if you have only an occasional day off; and you should therefore endeavor to eliminate all doubtful factors from the combination that goes to make your day's outing one of pleasure.

CHAPTER II.

The All-Round Gun.

In the selection of a gun for all-round work there are quite a number of points to be considered. In the first place you want a gun heavy enough to do fairly good work when among the largest game that you intend following, while at the same time it must be light enough not to be cumbersome when you visit the field or cover for smaller game. There is such a wide difference in the conditions pertaining to the pursuit of the different varieties of game that the novice may think it impossible to secure a gun that will stop a goose or duck in full feather, coming down on a stiff northeaster, and at the same time to be a handy weapon for the quail or woodcock. I am well aware that the gun is not yet evolved that will do all this in the best possible manner, and we must therefore do the best we can with the material we have, conceding something in the way of size of bore and weight of gun against our predilection for what is best for large game, while we must add to the weight of the weapon most desirable for light work, making such concession in the direction that will give us the best results with the variety of shooting that will be most commonly practiced, thus securing a gun that will do nearly as good work as any while following our favorite line of sport, and at the same time something that will do fairly good work among large game, and not be too cumbersome when we visit the stubble field or woodcock cover.

There is so wide a difference in the opinions of different shooters as to the proper make-up of the best gun for any particular class of work that it is impossible to construct a model that will give perfect satisfaction to all, but with the aid of a large experience with the gun, as well as opportunity to note the views of many hundreds of sportsmen whom I have met in widely distant sections of this broad land, I will endeavor to describe a model that will at least perform its allotted task in a creditable manner, whatever may be said of its style or finish.

A very large majority of sportsmen devote most of their time to upland shooting, and I shall therefore take as a model the very lightest made gun that can be depended upon to do fairly good work on larger game, leaving to the one who shoots the larger or smaller game in excess of other varieties the responsibility of making such change in bore, length of barrels, or weight of metal, as will best suit his case.

The gun I wish to describe is of 12-gauge, with 28-inch barrels, and weighs seven pounds. The right barrel, or the one that is first fired, is cylinder bored from breech to muzzle, while the left is a modified choke. The gun must be of good material throughout and made by a skillful workman, and it may be a hammerless with all the modern improvements, at the option of the owner, only be sure that it fits you and is well balanced. With such a gun and shells that are properly loaded for the occasion you may visit the resort of any of the many different varieties of feathered game that inhabit this continent, with the assurance that a correct aim will bring you abundant sport. Of course it is not to be expected that one can do the execution among a flock of ducks or geese, or bring them from quite so far up in the sky, as he could with a heavier gun and correspondingly heavy charges; but at singles within fair range very satisfactory work can be done, and after a fair trial at different kinds of game, especially if your favorite sport is among the grouse and woodcock covers, I very much doubt that you would be inclined to exchange your gun for one of different pattern. Now for reason for "the faith that is in me:"

I have chosen the 12-bore because I have both done and seen done excellent work with it among nearly all the different varieties of feathered game to be found in this country. I have made the barrel 28 inches in length in order that it may be handy in cover; for in nearly all sections of our country there is an abundance of this, and longer barrels are unwieldy in the dense covers of New England and the Middle States, or the pine thickets and canebrakes of the South, as well as in the tangled cornfields of the West. I have placed the weight at seven pounds, for a lighter gun will not shoot the charges necessary for successful sport among the larger game without too much recoil for comfort, while at the same time the weight is not over burdensome for the average man or boy to carry for a day's tramp over the stubble fields or through the cover. I have bored the barrel that is to be fired first a true cylinder, for several reasons; the most important, perhaps, is that the spread of the shot is much wider and more uniform at a short distance than it is possible to obtain by any known method of choke. This gives the best possible gun for the brush, for in ordinary cover shooting it is safe to say that four birds out of every five are killed inside the twenty-yard line, and very often, especially in woodcock shooting, ten to fifteen yards will cover the distance. The cylinder bore will also shoot a bullet accurately enough at short distances without damage to the gun, which cannot be done in a barrel that is choked. It will also carry the many devices of shot cases in use by shooters much more accurately than can be done in a choke bore, for the charge meets with no obstruction to break or impair its form. The recoil is also less in the cylinder bore, which is a matter of no small moment to the shooter who is at all disturbed by it. The barrel with a modified choke will put more shot into a far-away bird than can be done with the cylinder, which is often an important factor in bagging your birds in open shooting. If the modified choke is not quite up to the requirements of your shooting, a full choke may be used instead, and when you have nothing but open work it may be advisable that the first barrel be a modified and the other a full choke.

With only one gun for the different varieties of game, something approaching the one I have attempted to describe will do most excellent service, but if you have a few dollars to spare you can secure two guns in one that will please you better by obtaining two sets of barrels that will fit the same stock. With the lighter barrels you can have a gun weighing six to seven pounds, as may best suit you for light work. If much of your shooting is in cover, both barrels should be cylinder bored. With the heavy barrels your gun may weigh eight or even nine pounds, according to your ability to carry weight, with one barrel modified and the other full choke. With such an outfit you are very nearly as well equipped as you would be with guns made specially for every variety of feathered game you may pursue.

There is a wide diversity of opinion as to the best gauge for a gun for the different varieties of game—even among experts. While some will use an 8-gauge with correspondingly heavy charges for ducks and geese, others will tell you that a smaller gauge and lighter charges will do the work equally well. Still others favor a medium gauge with plenty of metal at the breech to stand the strain of the heavy charges they use, and so many shooters can be found who vary slightly or widely from their brethren in these matters that it is a hopeless task to attempt to formulate a standard for general use. In upland shooting a still greater diversity of opinion exists, for while the fowler with rarely an exception pins his faith to an 8, 10 or 12-gauge, the bird shooters vary in their choice all the way from a 10 to a 20-gauge, and every man of them will conclusively prove to you that his favorite gauge is the only one that is really adapted to this work. The man who favors a 10-gauge will tell you that his gun will carry a charge that will stop a far-away, full-feathered bird—a charge that a lighter gun cannot stand—and he will also tell you that the extra weight, to which you object, is most desirable; for when you get it in position it stays there, instead of wabbling all around the mark, as a light one will; while on the other hand the man who uses a smaller gauge will claim that he can kill far-away birds as well as the other, only, owing to the smaller quantity of shot and consequent less spread, it requires a more perfect aim, which he will proudly tell you means better shooting; and then he will go into ecstasy over the much less weight that he has to carry, both in gun and shells.

The question of "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" can readily be answered in this case by the beginner himself, even when he has had scant opportunity to acquire knowledge as to the relative merits of the different bores in common use, as he has for a guide the fact that the expert shot can do good work with a good gun, whether it be an 8 or 20-gauge, and he should therefore select the one that appears to him best suited to his own individual needs, subject to change, of course, should he find upon trial that the result is not satisfactory.

If the novice has no predilection for any particular gauge, I would advise him to select the one that is best suited to the variety of game he intends to pursue. For geese and ducks, a 10-bore will perhaps come as near to what he wants as any other; while for ordinary upland and cover shooting a 12-gauge will probably give as good satisfaction as any; and for light work, on rail and woodcock, or the so-called shore birds, a 16-bore will be found satisfactory. The sportsman with abundant means at command can of course provide himself with a complete armory, from which he can select the gun best suited for the variety of game that he is pursuing, but the man with only one gun can do very well provided he will follow the instructions given as to finding by experiment the proper loads for his gun, both with light and heavy charges, and intelligently apply the knowledge thus obtained by adapting his charges to the requirements of the sport on hand. There is no gauge of gun made that will do good work on geese and ducks with a charge that is just right for woodcock, while the load that will bring down the former will prove to be most decidedly unsatisfactory among the alders and birches.

The length of gun barrels for ordinary field work is usually from 28 to 30 inches, although a gun may occasionally be found that will vary in one or other direction from this. For open shooting many sportsmen prefer 30 inches, claiming that with the longer base their aim is more sure, as they can hold more steadily, while they can burn more powder than it is possible to do in shorter barrels.

In cover shooting nearly all agree that the shorter ones are best, as they are not so unwieldy, especially when the undergrowth is somewhat dense. Many good brush shots use barrels as short as 26 inches, and I have more than once seen capital work done with 24-inch barrels; but the latter are too short for general use, at least for the beginner, for the hang and balance of the gun is so different that there is great danger that the practice will unsteady him for good work with barrels of ordinary length. Ducking guns are often of 32-inch barrel, and some of the heavier ones are even longer.

In deciding this matter the beginner should be governed by the conditions which belong to his own particular case, always bearing in mind that an unusually long or heavy gun, that might be just the one for a giant, is not the pattern that would suit a half-grown boy, and that the gun that fits the boy will not do at all for some one twice his size. As the length of the barrels has considerable to do with the hang or balance of the arm, it will be well to look closely to this, for in order to be able to do your best work your gun must hang to suit you, and it will be better for you to add or concede an inch than to be troubled with a gun that does not hang quite to please you.

CHAPTER III.

Ammunition.

We will take it for granted that you have succeeded in obtaining a gun that fits you, or comes very near doing so, and will now proceed with the practice that it will be necessary for you to take before you can become even a passable wing shot. I am writing of the average man. I am well aware that there is occasionally one who appears to be a natural shot, and seems to need scarcely any preliminary practice—one who, almost from the start, can bring down his birds in nearly faultless style. Such cases are rare, however, and should you be so fortunate as to be thus gifted, thank kindly fortune and diligently continue the practice as herein outlined, resting assured that it will at least do you no harm, and may help you out when you get in a "hot corner" among the birds.

In the first place you should make yourself perfectly acquainted with your gun, should you not have done so during the preliminary practice you have had. You must learn to handle it in a natural and easy manner, one entirely free from stiffness, awkwardness or constraint of any kind, so that you can perform all the different evolutions promptly and with an easy grace of motion. If you are not perfectly satisfied that you are handling your gun mechanically, as it were, without labored or constrained effort, it will be well for you to practice these movements until you shall have become satisfied that you are reasonably perfect in their performance. Until you are so proficient, your mind will not be free from thought of the minor details, and consequently not in the best possible condition to grasp and overcome other details and difficulties as they arise.

In fact, you cannot hope for success as a wing shot until you are entirely without thought or anxiety about the manipulation of the gun. All the motions necessary to its proper handling should be performed instinctively, as it were, leaving your mind perfectly free and untrammeled, that it may be in proper condition to quickly take in and quickly provide for the ever changing contingencies that add so much to the enjoyment of our sports afield.

When your bird is but a short distance from dense cover and safety, you will surely score a lost opportunity if you are forced to glance at your hands to ascertain if they are in proper position. It will, in a large majority of cases, amount to pretty much the same thing if you have to stop the fraction of a second to think of any of these details. The old saying that "he who hesitates is lost" applies with peculiar force to this, as well as to many other cases that come to the sportsman, with scarcely exceptions enough to prove the rule. You should therefore earnestly strive to so perfect your practice and knowledge of the rudiments of the science that you will not forget to load and cock your gun before you flush the bird, nor be disturbed by doubts as to the position of your hands after it is in the air.

When you feel assured that you are fairly well skilled in the handling of your gun you can begin practice at a target. The very best practice for a beginner is to prove by actual test at a stationary target just what is the proper charge for his gun, as while doing this he will not only determine this very important matter, but at the same time will obtain valuable knowledge upon other points that will be of great service to him when he comes to try a moving target. He will benefit by the practice, and should he learn so well that he will not forget it, that his gun will shoot where it is aimed, and not where he intended to aim it, he will have accomplished more in the way of education than many far older hands at the business have done.

In making this test there are several very important points to be attended to. The result should show you just how you should load to obtain the best possible work that your gun is capable of performing. Penetration and uniformity of pattern you must have. They must be obtained with a charge that will not knock all the shoot out of you by an excessive recoil. I am well aware that many good shots can stand the racket of a heavy charge and its recoil, but I also know that many others cannot, and if the strain upon their nerves is too severe they become gun-shy and will dodge at the instant of pulling trigger, except perhaps when under the excitement caused by a nearby rise, when they can shoot well enough; but when birds that they have had their eye upon for any length of time come within shooting distance they nearly always escape, owing to the fact that the shooter's nerves had time to prepare to cringe from the expected shock. When it comes, or just before it comes, they do cringe and destroy their aim, although the proprietor of these sensitive tissues may never know or suspect the reason why he nearly always misses these fair shots.

In order, then, that your score shall not suffer from this cause—to say nothing of bruised cheek and black and blue shoulder—it will be better for you to try if you cannot find by experiment something in the way of ammunition and in the manner of loading that will do proper work without pounding you to a jelly and unsettling your nerves to an extent that unsteadies your shooting and mars the pleasure of your days afield.

Now in order that we may accomplish our purpose and obtain the best results, let us make the test an exhaustive one, so thorough that no change will be necessary so long as you keep the gun that you have selected.

In the first place you should decide just which particular brand of powder you will use, and after you have made the selection, stick to it until you are thoroughly well convinced that something decidedly better can be had, and you have proved by practical test at the target that it will suit you better than the brand you are using. All the prominent manufacturers of powder, black and so-called smokeless, or nitro, turn out excellent articles, and you can scarcely go wrong in making your selection provided you choose a brand of good quality. Cheap goods are usually dirty and often lacking in power, but the chief fault to be found with them is that they are often deficient in the very quality that we are now so anxiously seeking, and that is uniformity. You should therefore select a brand of good quality, not necessarily the highest in price, but something that is good enough to be reliable. If you select black powder, choose a brand with a grain of medium size—not too coarse nor too fine. Should you decide in favor of the nitro—which at the present time is in very general use and appears to have come to stay—the selection should be made as advised for the black, taking care to choose a brand that has been in use long enough to test its quality. The directions given for loading apply only to black powder, so you must follow the directions as to manner of loading the nitro which accompany each package; or, if such directions are not given, the dealer will furnish you the necessary instructions, which should be implicitly followed so far as the manner of loading is concerned, taking great care when you change the quantity in experimenting that the added or lessened amount be very slight until you obtain the charge that is best suited to your gun. The nitro is quicker in action than the black, but this will make little difference to the deliberate shot. The snap shot, however, will find that in crossing shots he must hold nearer to his birds, or he will get badly left.

A few years ago I met an old friend and former shooting companion whom I had not seen for nearly twenty years. In the good old days when we were boys together we had enjoyed many glorious days among the birds. He was an excellent snap shot and I took no little pride to myself for his skill, as it was at my suggestion and through my instruction that he acquired the art. After cordial greetings our conversation naturally turned to shooting, and I was greatly surprised to hear him say that he had pretty much given up shooting, for the reason that he had lost his grip and could no longer do satisfactory work. Upon inquiry I learned that for two or three years he had been unable to do anything like good work at crossing shots. With a bird going straightaway, however, he had never had any trouble, and could kill them as well as he ever could. He at first thought that lack of practice was answerable for the misses, but after taking practice enough to put him in condition without making much improvement in his shooting, he reluctantly and sorrowfully came to the conclusion that he was not so young as he once was, and that he had become sluggish in his motions and consequently was shooting behind the crossing birds. He had tried to get the better of this condition of affairs by holding further ahead of his birds; but, as he well said, in snap shooting one cannot take time for thought, not even the smallest fraction of a second, for if he does he is lost, or rather the bird is lost. Not only this, but the hesitation when the instant for action arrives will invariably cause trouble with one's nerves and totally unfit him for this style of shooting. He had never been a brilliant shot in deliberate work in the open, although he could do fairly well, and he had but little love for the sport until he learned the art of snap shooting. Then he woke up and for quite a number of years I knew him as one of the most enthusiastic sportsmen of my acquaintance. After listening to his story I advised him to try nitro powder in place of the black that he had been using, for I thought it was enough quicker to just about make up for the sluggish action of the nerves, and without doubt it would bring him back to his old form. This idea impressed him as being a good one, and he promised to give it a trial and write me particulars of the result. About two weeks later I received a letter from him from which I take the liberty to transcribe the opening paragraph, as it is right to the point: "Eureka! the nitro gets there on time and I can shoot as well as I ever could, and shall not give up the sport so long as I have a leg to stand on and can get nitro."

I have since frequently given the same advice to others, who, like my friend, were not quite up to the mark for quick work, and the result has been most satisfactory in nearly every instance. I have used several of the best brands of nitro for open shooting, with the best of results, but for snap shooting it was not at all satisfactory. I can still get there on time with my favorite brand of black powder that I have used for so many years, but when my nerves do fail to respond to the music of the fluttering wings in proper time, or my muscles become too sluggish to do their work in proper manner, I shall turn with perfect confidence to the nitro for snap shooting.

The ordinary wads with black edge that are commonly used will answer very well on top of the powder, using the thin cardboard ones on the shot.

For your shot you can take your choice from the list of prominent manufacturers, using chilled shot for a choke bore, and either chilled or soft for a cylinder, as you may prefer. Practically there is little difference in the quality of their goods, but there is often a difference to be found between the size of the same numbers of the different makers. For this reason it is better to use only the brand that you may select, as you will then know just what you are shooting, which is often a very important point, as you will perhaps discover in the course of your experiments.

About twenty years ago my friend Schaffer, of Boston, sent me a small bag of chilled shot that he had imported from England, with a request that I would try it and report result. I tested the shot, both at the target and on game, but was unable to find that it was any better for my use in a cylinder bored gun than the soft shot, except that I found the spread to be a trifle more even, but there was not difference enough to make up for the higher price and difficulty of procuring the shot, for it was not then made in this country. A few years later, while assisting a friend who was experimenting with this shot, I found that in a choke bored gun it was much better than the soft shot, for the pellets did not jam and get out of shape when passing through the choke, as the soft shot nearly always do, and consequently the pattern was much better, while the penetration was so nearly the same that we could practically see no difference. At the present time chilled shot are extensively manufactured in this country, and, as the price is but little more than for the soft, it is within the reach of every one and has come into very general use. In fact, it has become a necessity, owing to the general use of choke bored guns.

The trap shooter is, without doubt, in a large measure responsible for the prevailing fashion, for it is often the case that the beginner, as well as many older hands, reading the published scores and full details of the gun used, as well as the ammunition and manner of loading, fondly imagines that with such a gun and similar loads he too can shoot. Now this is well enough, provided the would-be shooter intends to confine his work with the gun to trap shooting, and has the nerve to stand the recoil of the heavy charges that are generally used in such work; but he must not forget that the very best gun in the world, even when charged with the most skillfully loaded ammunition, will kill no birds without a good man behind it. He will also find it to be very important to remember that a good man behind a gun, with very rarely an exception, means something entirely different from top scores to begin with. Ask any of our best shots at the trap about this, heed the instructive moral that his reply suggests, and with persevering effort follow the directions given in these pages, taking especial care, by exhaustive test, to find the very best combination of ammunition for your gun, then practice until you are perfectly satisfied with your shooting. When this result has been obtained you are perfectly qualified to adopt any style of gun or ammunition that you may believe to be best suited to your needs, without consulting these pages for a hint as to what is proper, for it is beyond the scope of this work to dictate to or even advise the expert shot.

CHAPTER IV.

Loading Shells.

Instruction or advice relative to loading shells is, of course, not needed by the expert, but as this book is written mainly for the benefit of the beginner, it will be best perhaps to give him a fair start by jotting down a few notes for his guidance at this important stage of his progress.

Nearly all dealers in sportsmen's goods at the present time carry a stock of loaded shells on hand for sale, while many of them will load to order just what you want; but as every one who shoots should know how to load his shells, he should procure an outfit and learn the trade, which he can readily do in a short time. Everything that you need in the way of implements can be purchased at almost any gun store. A gauge for powder and one for shot, with a loader. The latter consists of a round block with a circular hole in the center, to hold the base of the shell; a cylinder to slip over the shell to hold it in place, and a rammer. These, with a crimper, are all that you need. The gauges should be of good quality and marked true to standard measure; in fact, all of your tools should be of good quality; they cost but little more and give much greater satisfaction. The ordinary shell that is in common use is both cheap and serviceable, and is good enough for general use. I have used these shells for years with very satisfactory results, the loss from misfires being so very small that it is not worth mention.

Before loading the shells I wish to say a few words, and to say them most emphatically, regarding the careless handling of powder. Never, under any circumstances whatever, when handling powder take any chances that are even remotely connected with danger. Be very careful with the package, even when it is a sealed can. Take extra care when loading your shells, and, above all else, as you value the life of your friend and your peace of mind, take double care after you have placed the shells in your gun. Always remember that the small charge you use for shooting birds will make a hole as large as a tumbler in the head of a bull if, when shot at, it is within a few feet of the muzzle, and at this distance it will take off the top of your friend's head, or an arm, or leg, while at a much greater distance he may be killed or maimed for life, or at the least be caused to suffer severely—and all because you were careless. There is no other reason than this for putting a charge of shot into your friend, and in order that you may never have to repent of anything of this nature, you have only to resolve, and to live up to it, that you will never, under any circumstances, allow your gun to point toward any one. After you have practiced this for a short time it will become very easy for you, and you will soon do it mechanically, scarcely giving it a thought.

In connection with this I would strongly advise that you never go shooting the second time with any one who does not implicitly observe this rule. I have been afield with many scores of individuals, not one of whom ever had opportunity to look down my gun barrels, and when I have found that any of my companions were careless in this respect I have taken good care not to risk further chances so far as they were concerned.

You should always know just where your companion is when shooting, and never, under any circumstances, allow yourself to shoot in his direction. A short, sharply uttered "hoo," to be instantly answered, will always give you the desired information as to his locality. Many accidents occur that might be avoided were this practice of signaling in universal use. Sincerely hoping that you will ponder well this advice and trusting that you will heed its admonitions, we will now proceed to load our shells.

In the first place you want an ordinary table or stand that is firm on its legs, in order that it may not shake and cause the shells to upset.

Two common earthen bowls, each of which will hold a pint, are about as handy as anything you can have, both for the powder and shot.

Place the little block for holding the shell directly in front of you a few inches from the edge of the table, with the bowls for the powder and shot upon the right hand side and near it, with the box of shells on your left. Place the wads for the powder loose on the table between the block and the bowls, and the cardboard wads between the block and the box of shells, or you can reverse the disposition of the wads if more convenient. The bowls should not be more than half or two-thirds full, as more than this quantity will result in scattering the ammunition on the table when you fill the measures. Take the cylinder in the right hand, and with the left take a shell, place it on the block and slip the cylinder over it. Then fill the powder measure full and draw a finger of the left hand over it so that it will be level full, in order that your charges may be uniform, which will not be the case if you use rounding or heaping measures, as there will in this case be more or less variation in spite of all the pains you may take. Pour the powder into the shell through the cylinder, put in one wad, taking care that it goes in straight. Ram it well down on the powder, not too hard, as this will crush the grains, but at the same time it must be given enough to crowd the powder well together. Then put in the second wad and ram this well home also. Then fill the shot measure level full, pour it in the shell and ram down on it one cardboard wad moderately firm, but not too hard, or you may bruise the shot or spread the shell, and then uniform shooting will not be possible. You can use the cover of the shell box to hold the loaded shells, putting it within convenient reach.

After you have loaded the desired number of shells, screw the crimper to the table, or, if you prefer it, you can screw it to a piece of inch board about two feet long by one foot wide, placing the end opposite the crimper in your chair, and sit upon it while you crimp the shells. After you have crimped them, they should be plainly marked on the wad with a number corresponding with the size of shot, and, if you should use different charges of powder for the same size of shot, this should also be marked on the wad, in order that you may always know just what you are shooting.

Of course, these directions are not arbitrary, but are intended as a guide for the beginner to give him a fair start, with the understanding that any change he may think advisable as to the manner of placing or handling his loading tools should by all means be tested, and those that are the most convenient and handy for him should be adopted, as the manner or method is immaterial, provided no course is taken that will destroy or impair the uniformity of the charges.

CHAPTER V.

Practice at a Mark.

We will now proceed with our experiments and try to find out the very best combination of powder and shot for our gun. We must have sufficient penetration to kill, and a pattern free from spaces where shot does not strike, through which game may escape, and in order to obtain these very important results you must not violate fundamental laws, either of nature or mechanics, by giving your powder a heavier load to carry than it properly can. If you put in the shell one dram of powder and two ounces of shot, and expect to obtain a killing penetration at twenty yards, you will find that you cannot do so, although the pattern may be all that could be desired. On the other hand, with four or five drams of powder and a quarter of an ounce of shot, the penetration will be most excellent, but the pattern will be entirely unsatisfactory. You should therefore conduct your experiments in such a manner that the result will not only give you good penetration, but show you a good pattern as well.

The charges that I have used for many years in a 12-gauge seven pound cylinder bored gun, with entirely satisfactory results, are, for the right barrel—which I nearly always use first—three drams of good black powder with five-eighths of an ounce of No. 10 shot, and for the left barrel the same amount of powder with seven-eighths of an ounce of No. 8 shot. These charges give good penetration and pattern, while the recoil is scarcely noticeable. I do not give these particulars as a guide for any one to follow until it has been shown by actual experiment that these charges are the best that can be found for the gun in use. Many cylinder bored guns will do good work with these charges, while with others the performance is not at all satisfactory.

I was once shooting quail in North Carolina with my friend Harry Reade, when his shells gave out and I handed him some loaded with No. 8 as above described, but he could do nothing with them, missing one-half of his birds, while those that he hit were so badly torn that they were worthless. I then gave him some loaded with No. 10, and with them he did some excellent work, killing eight or ten without a miss, and so well did he like them that he declared that he would use no other charge.

In making experiments I would advise that you load not less than six shells just alike, taking care to mark them in such a manner that you will know just how they are loaded, and then load others with different charges in sets of six each, until you have quite a varied assortment. Perhaps it will be as well as any way to load one set each in the manner described, that is, if your gun is 12-gauge; but if larger or smaller you must use your judgment in increasing or reducing the quantity accordingly. Then test them at the target, shooting with the gun at your shoulder in the ordinary manner, or firing from a fixed rest, as you may prefer. On no account should you have a preference for any particular charge. Let the targets settle this question, and when your choice is made do not change in the slightest degree until you have demonstrated beyond a doubt that you have something better. When making these experiments, you should bear in mind that the barrel you use first should make a well-spread, even pattern at twenty yards; as in nearly all your shooting—in cover at least—your birds will be from fifteen to twenty-five yards away when shot at, and that from five to ten yards further will usually cover the distance for the second barrel.

As a rule you will find that the same amount of powder with a reduced quantity of shot will give more penetration and greater spread. While an increased quantity of shot will lessen the penetration, it may at the same time, owing to the greater number of pellets, also increase the diameter of the spread.

So you see that there are quite a number of points for you to settle, and many of them require nice discrimination in order that you may finally come through the experiments with the very best result that it is possible to obtain.

This question as to the proper charge for guns has never been settled satisfactorily, and it never will be so long as there is one-tenth of the difference that now exists between different guns, even when to all appearance they are precisely alike.

As a rule all guns that are turned out by first-class manufacturers will shoot well when they are properly loaded, and nearly all will shoot fairly well when loaded with almost any of the charges that are in common use; but "fairly well" is not good enough for you and me, and we will not rest content until we have found just the very best charge to bring out the very best shooting qualities of our gun. When we have done this, we can go afield with perfect faith in the killing power of the gun and ammunition, and with the confidence thus begotten can soon learn to hold the gun in the proper direction and to pull at the proper time to give it opportunity to do its work in a proper manner.

While in practice at the target do not allow yourself to be satisfied with a careless or nervous aim that places the center of the charge at any great distance from the center of the target, but practice until you find that nine times out of ten the bull's-eye is well within the circle, and the nearer to the center the better. I know that this work at a target is very tame, but if you wish to become an expert wing shot this practice is the very best that you can have, as you will find when perfect in this lesson that the confidence you have that you can hold all right will be of very great advantage to you when you glance along the barrels at a swiftly flying bird.

When you begin your practice, if you can find a congenial companion who will adopt the same methods that you intend practicing and will accompany you and join in the practice, it will be much pleasanter and better in every way for both of you. The emulation that will be sure to spring up between you will be an incentive for both to persevere and become proficient in the art, to say nothing of the companionship and the mutual assistance that you can give to each other.

A generous rivalry in this pursuit is often of great benefit to both parties, as it usually sharpens the wits and brightens the perceptive faculties, enabling you to take instant advantage of the unexpected, as well as to quickly see and comprehend what will best serve your purpose.

Even in so tame a pursuit as shooting at a target there are constantly coming up matters each of which appears trifling, but when all these seemingly unimportant things are properly mastered and brought into your service, they round up into a most satisfactory whole, that will render you most valuable assistance when striving to master the ever changing mysteries that surround our woodland sports. There is nothing that will help you more when trying to penetrate these mysteries and also when learning to shoot than a thorough and practical knowledge of all of the small details that are inseparably connected with the rudiments of the science.

This knowledge, when backed by steady nerves and good judgment, will bring you out a good shot, perhaps an excellent one. You should therefore study well the principles of cause and effect as they may come to you, and earnestly strive to thoroughly understand the fundamental laws that govern even the most insignificant trifles that occur during your practice, and above all you should endeavor to store up and retain the knowledge thus gleaned for future use as occasion may arise. Perfect knowledge of these minor details will do much toward imparting to you confidence and coolness when under fire, without which very essential qualities you will never become a good shot, and it is therefore best for you to continue practice at the target until you feel perfectly sure that you are master of your nerves as well as of the proper manner in which to handle your gun, and until you are satisfied that you have learned about all that is possible from such practice and can place the center of your charge close to the bull's-eye very nearly every time.

Perhaps I have not been quite so definite as I should have been regarding the manner of taking aim, and it will therefore be as well to add that you should never pull trigger until you have an aim, and you should practice bringing your gun to your shoulder and sighting along the barrels until you can quickly obtain a satisfactory aim at the bull's-eye. It is absolutely necessary not only that you do this well, but quickly—not hastily nor carelessly, but with a deliberate quickness that will get you there on time when you catch sight of the flying bird. In practice at this with empty gun you will undoubtedly be rather slow when you begin, but you will soon improve if you are careful to take good time to obtain a perfect aim before you pull—performing this operation the instant you are satisfied that your aim is true—and then try again and endeavor to deliberately perform the operation a trifle more quickly. Do not on any account allow yourself to hurry or feel nervous about it; only devote your attention to securing a perfect aim, and in a short time, with practice, you will find that you can do this well and quickly.

CHAPTER VI.

Practice at a Moving Mark.

When you are entirely satisfied that you are perfect in your practice at a stationary target, it is time for you to begin with a moving one, and you will find it to be a very good plan to secure for your first practice a quantity of common quart tin cans, such as are used for canning fruit, replacing them with smaller ones when you are reasonably expert in hitting them.

Your companion, if you have secured one, will throw them for you, or if not a small boy will do so, as all you need from him is to stand nearly at your side and throw the can at moderate speed straight away while you find it along the gun barrels and pull trigger as soon as you have a perfect aim. Should you have any trouble in finding the mark over the gun barrels, try a few of them with the hammers down, not forgetting to pull as soon as you are on, and above all else keep perfectly cool, and you will soon be able to do good work.

When you have changed to the smaller cans, and can hit them nearly every time, you should direct your companion to vary the angle of flight somewhat, but not too abruptly, as it will be much better for you to go slow and sure, and not try too great a change until you are further advanced in your practice. Indeed, I would not recommend more than a very slight variation either in elevation or speed until you are reasonably perfect in the straightaway shots, and even then the change in direction to one side should be very gradual. Abrupt changes and unknown angles should be reserved for your advanced lessons; meantime contenting yourself with the assurance that when you have completely mastered all of the minor difficulties those of more importance will be much more easily surmounted, and that the surest and shortest road to success in this pursuit is through patient and persevering effort in solving the problems and overcoming the difficulties that are encountered in the earlier steps.

When changing the angle of flight, do not forget that the object of the practice is to teach you just how to hold on a bird that is flying in that direction, and that one is just as likely to rise on your right hand and fly across you to the left as it is to rise on your left and fly to the right. So, in order that you may be prepared for either event, your companion should frequently change position from one side of you to the other, thus giving you practice at the different angles.

When taking aim at these crossing shots you should find the mark by glancing along the barrels, then follow it a foot or two or until the gun has the proper swing, when you should pull without in the least checking the motion of the gun, and above all else do not yank the gun off its aim when you pull. When you can do all this every time, with the flutter and racket of the startled birds thundering in your ears, I should dearly like to "shake," for you will then be a better shot than I, and if you have accomplished this through following the rules here laid down, my pleasure at your success will be second only to the pride I shall feel as your instructor.

I am well aware that many good shots do not agree with me as to the method of taking aim at crossing birds, but insist that the proper way is to hold ahead far enough for the bird and charge to come together; but I do not propose to argue this question here, as much valuable ink and paper have already been wasted upon the subject, and, so far as I know, without at all settling the question or making a single convert from either side. I will only say in this connection that I know that a very large majority of beginners will be much better satisfied with the results obtained from the method here outlined than it will be possible for them to be by the guesswork method that is necessarily involved in the hold ahead theory.

I do not condemn the method, nor do I find any fault with it—I have both seen done and done too much good work by this method for that—but what I wish understood is that, with perhaps an occasional exception, no one should attempt this method until he has completely mastered the science of holding on; then if he wishes to try holding ahead he can do so, and he will find that the knowledge he has gained will be of great advantage to him in this, as he will have no trouble in pitching his gun to the right elevation and the remainder will come with practice, provided he has a correct eye and is possessed of reasonably good judgment.

Snap shooting in dense covers, when you are expert, is very fascinating sport, as well as effective, as you will get lots of shooting that you would not have did you attempt to cover your birds in the ordinary manner.

Comparatively few even of our best shots are expert in this method, which is partly owing to the fact that they have not tried it, and partly to lack of opportunity, as nearly all of their shooting is over a comparatively open country where quick work is unnecessary.

In snap shooting it is of the utmost importance that your gun should fit you to a nicety, as it must come to your shoulder correctly pointed and be instantly fired without any attempt to take an aim.

I have met a few individuals who could shoot fairly well with the gun held in almost any position, but this is trick shooting and is not practical, as it entails much practice and requires more skill and judgment than most men possess.

I learned snap shooting in the dense swamps of New England and among the tangled laurel thickets of the Alleghanies, but did not attempt it until I was fairly proficient in the method I have already attempted to describe. I was not forced to take to the thickets from lack of game in the more open shooting grounds, as birds were very plentiful in those days, but I dearly loved to contend with the difficulties of the wild and tangled growth, and then the satisfaction experienced when I made a successful shot, especially a difficult one, far outweighed the pleasure afforded by a score of the easy shots to be obtained in open shooting.

In order to become a good snap shot you must be perfectly cool and entirely free from any trouble with your nerves, while at the same time those nerves must be keyed to their highest tension in order that the electric thrill that flashes through them from brain to finger tip may get there on time. You must be quick in action, instant in thought, and above all else there must be deep down in your heart an ardent love for the sport. If, upon sizing yourself up and taking account of stock, you find all these items on the right side of the balance sheet, I would advise you by all means to take to the thickets and perseveringly practice until, with "eye of faith and finger of instinct," you can stop the hurtling grouse and bring back to earth the soaring woodcock as he twists and turns through the tangled tree tops.

In practicing to perfect yourself in snap shooting you will find nothing better than the method described on page 98 with the stones skipping over the water. In order to obtain the best results from this practice, it is better that the one who throws the stones for you should be concealed from you, as your first object is to perfect yourself in quick work, and this end will be sooner and better accomplished if you know nothing of the flight of the target until it is time to shoot; only take good care to be ready, and the very instant the mark is in sight keep both eyes steadfastly upon it and as quickly as possible bring the gun in position to your shoulder, pulling the trigger the instant it is in place, without the slightest effort to take an aim. When the charge strikes the water you can, of course, see just how near or far you come from the target, and by carefully and with good judgment trying to improve your method, you will soon become a good snap shot.

This practice with the skipping stones is also very useful when you begin at crossing shots, only in this case you must deliberately sight the mark along the barrels and follow it until you get the motion all right before you pull.

Until you are somewhat proficient in bringing down your birds, I would strongly advise that you make no attempt at snap shooting. I would also advise that you refrain from all practice with rifle or pistol until your education in wing shooting is complete, as the nicety of aim required in rifle shooting will be very apt to cause you to hesitate or dwell too long on your aim for good work with the shotgun, and it will be much the better for you to avoid anything of this nature.

CHAPTER VII.

Shooting Companions.

When you are perfectly satisfied with the result of your practice at the moving targets and feel assured that you have mastered the theory as well as the method, you are ready to put to the test among the birds the worth of the system you have so long and patiently endeavored to master.

If the end of your probation has brought you to about the first days of October, you may indeed be thankful, for in the northern sections of our country that is the very best time of all the open season to visit the haunts of our feathered game; while in the southern portion, where the laws permit, you can improve the early morning and late afternoon hours to get accustomed to the new order of things.

You will find that there is a vast difference between the flight of inanimate target and the swift rush of startled bird, and the nerves you thought were under such perfect control will play you tricks that you never dreamed of, despite your best efforts to keep them in subjection—that is, if you are an ordinary mortal with ordinary nerves, which is to be sincerely hoped is the case; for it is only with such nerves that you can ever hope to enjoy to the full the delights of our woodland sports.

Why! I would not barter one thrill of the ecstatic throb of these sensitive tissues, when the music of the quickly beating pinions of startled bird flashes and vibrates a responsive echo along the tense strings, for all the satisfaction that brilliant shot can give; so when your nerves run riot and play you tricks at rise of bird, bless them for the pleasing excitement enjoyed and try to so school them that, while responsive to the delightful music, they shall at the same time do your bidding and give you added pleasure as you calmly and coolly, with unerring aim, bring down the swiftly flying form.

Advice to keep cool is easy to give, but not always easy to follow. Indeed I do not expect that you will come anywhere near keeping cool when you get into a covey of grouse and they are rising all around you, but I do expect that you will improve in this respect until you can give a good account of yourself, even when the fun is somewhat exciting.

When you make your first visit to the haunts of the birds it will be a very good plan for you to secure an experienced companion who has a good dog, as you will in this case have nothing on your mind to prevent giving your undivided attention to the birds. But if you cannot procure such companion the next best thing is to obtain a dog, provided you can find an experienced one that is steady. Failing in this, you will do very well alone—much better than you will with an inexperienced or unsteady dog. Upon arrival at the grounds where you intend to begin, you should place the shells in your gun and be very careful that the muzzle never, under any circumstances, points in the direction of your companion, or any one else, should it be accidentally discharged. When walking through the cover your gun should be carried in a natural and easy manner in such position as will be best for you when you wish to quickly bring it to your shoulder.

When you hear the first flutter of the rising bird you must instantly prepare for action by turning and facing the bird—if it is not in front of you—and as soon as you catch sight of it, all you have to do to kill it stone dead is to just rehearse the lesson you learned in practice at the tin cans or other objects that were thrown for you.

After all your practice you should be so well grounded in the rudiments that a little practice among the birds ought to enable you to soon become at least a fairly good shot.

Before you seek the haunts of the birds it will be well for you to give earnest thought as to the proper manner in which to conduct yourself toward your companion when afield, in order that your mutual pleasure may not be marred by any act or word that will cause the slightest feeling of annoyance to the companion of your sports. Gentlemanly instinct will carry the most ignorant novice safely over many of the minor difficulties he may encounter, for ignorance of what is proper to do or not to do in one who possesses this instinct will be readily overlooked and forgiven, while premeditated violation of the rules of etiquette pertaining to the sports of the field will never be condoned or forgotten. The gentleman, if he have the wit to profit by experience, will never lack congenial companions to share his sport; but if he is not built that way, he need not wonder why he does not receive a second invitation, or that good fellows do not find it convenient to accompany him.

There is no pastime in which the simple rules that should govern are so religiously esteemed as they are in the sports of the field. Even the hog will grunt when you take a shot that belongs to him, and the most inveterate nuisance who claims the bird that does not belong to him will kick when the same game is tried on him. In fact, you will nearly always find that the loud-mouthed advocate of fair play and the observance of rules is very prone to violate all rules when they debar his taking a shot or pocketing a bird. You will also find that willful wrong is very rarely noticed by a sportsman, except that he takes good care that the perpetrator does not have the second opportunity to work the game on him.

As a rule, desirable companions also avoid the man who thinks that, in order to have you thoroughly understand that he is a first-class shot, it is necessary that he should tell you of it, and by repeatedly recounting incidents illustrative of this point to so impress it upon your mind that you will not forget. About the worst feature of this is that the idiot actually believes that the cause of your desertion is from fear that you will be beaten in shooting, and the fact that you do not care to accompany him is paraded as proof positive that he is the better shot, and so deeply seated are the feelings that prompt the self-praise that he can never be brought to know that this very disagreeable habit of glorifying himself is alone responsible for the trouble, and that his shooting, no matter how good it may be, has no part in the matter; for the sportsman, if he be worthy the name, ever delights in witnessing good shooting, and next to his own performance comes that of his companion, when that companion, with an innate sense of the "eternal fitness of things," wears his honors with becoming modesty. A transient exhibition of pardonable pride, however, is always allowable and excusable when under the excitement attendant upon the success of a difficult shot. The man who always has a plausible excuse for every miss may be tolerated provided he is otherwise a good fellow, and the red bush that was in the way, the dodge of the bird, the defective cartridge, and the score of other reasons he may give, will perhaps serve to amuse you; but when the man who misses asserts that the bird is down and insists upon your working the dog over and over the ground, to find what you well know is "over the hills and far away," the matter assumes a serious aspect, and even your dog will commend your resolve that you will allow yourself only just this one day of that performance.

Did the man who invents excuses for his misses only know that nine times out of every ten there is only one excuse for a miss, he possibly might attempt reform by trying to learn to point his gun in the proper direction; or did the man who tries to make you believe that he thinks he has killed his bird only know just what you really think of the performance, he would most assuredly reform, at least so far as you are concerned.

The man who knows it all is nearly always a nuisance, especially so when he gives you points as to the proper manner in which to work out grounds with which you are perfectly familiar, and insists that places you know to be barren shall be carefully beaten out, while others, where you nearly always find birds, shall be passed by, giving you scientific reasons why birds should be plentiful where you never find a feather, and accounting for their presence where you usually find them as an accident; giving you at every turn a treatise upon their habits, together with chapter and verse in relation to food supply and instinct, until you are weary, and the more you think it over the more inclined are you to forego further pleasure of this description.

The hog is perhaps more universally avoided than any other on the list of undesirable companions. Selfishness is not a trait that is highly esteemed in any of the walks of life, but when the case-hardened epidermis and unsightly bristles intrude themselves as an adjunct to our sports afield, no one can be found so poor in knowledge of what is decent and proper that will not most decidedly condemn it. Even the most persistent perpetrator of the outrage will conclusively show that the debasing influence of the practice has not entirely obliterated his sense of the turpitude of the performance when the racket is worked to his disadvantage. The man who deliberately takes the shot that belongs to his companion, or pockets the game he knows he did not kill, is a hog. So also is he who insists upon taking the best position or best side of the cover, and in the same category is he who in any way tries to secure his own pleasure at the expense of that of his companion. There is small cause for wonder that these men get left when good fellows choose companions to share their sports.

I once accepted an invitation to go shooting with a man who devoted a large share of his time each season to field sports. He had plenty of money and spare time, and one of the most complete and elaborate outfits that I have ever seen. I had often wondered why it was that the seats of his hunting wagon were so often vacant, but long before the day was over the current of my thoughts was running in the opposite direction and I found myself wondering that these seats were ever occupied. When we arrived at the cover and sent on the dogs, my dog pointed a short distance in front and to my left, when, greatly to my surprise, my companion, who was twenty yards to my right, hastily crossing in front of me took position where the bird would probably go, as the main cover was in that direction. Thinking that this was quite an innovation upon the customary practice under such circumstances, I waited until he was ready and then moved on a few steps, when my sense of propriety was still further shocked, for when the woodcock rose on my side and flew to the right I saw him raise his gun, so I remained quiet and he shot across in front of me and killed it; but this was nothing when compared to what he would have done, for another bird rose partly behind me, which I killed before he had time to shoot, and saw he had intended to do, although I was squarely between him and the bird, and as I was congratulating myself that my quick work had saved my ears a violent shock, he capped the climax of the whole business by telling me in a deeply aggrieved tone that I should have squatted down and given him a chance to kill the bird. It is needless to say that this gave me quite a turn, and I then and there resolved that, so far as I was concerned, none of those vacant seats would ever again be filled.

After I had somewhat recovered from the shock I had received I got along much better than I had anticipated, as I improved the occasion to store my mind with lots of useful knowledge as to what not to do; and I have always thought the day a profitable one.

I adopted the plan of humoring him to the top of his bent and rather enjoyed speculating as to what he would do next, both earning and receiving his profuse thanks for the very sportsmanlike manner—as he put it—in which I conducted myself, and I also received pressing invitations to again accompany him, but somehow something always happened to prevent, and I have never since enjoyed a day afield with him.

The man who has the best dog and is bound to convince you of the fact, if talk and brag will do it, comes far short of your ideal of an agreeable companion, as upon this subject nearly all sportsmen are inclined to be a trifle touchy. The man who has the best gun may be tolerated, provided he does not too perseveringly parade the fact before you; in fact, both of these men may be excellent companions if they possess the good sense to refrain from all mention of the subject and let their dogs and guns do all the talking, as all sportsmen admire as well as respect modest worth, and the really good dog or gun is sure to receive at their hands its meed of praise.

The man who makes long shots sometimes makes himself ridiculous as well as disagreeable, especially when he gives you day and date together with minute particulars of something at least ten yards further away than the one you felt so proud of a minute before, and, although you know that the man is lying, somehow your pleasure is spoiled, and as you think over the matter you find that your list of desirable companions is one name short. The long shot fiend is nearly always an expert fancy shot as well, and no matter how difficult or curious a shot you may make, he will at once tell you of a dozen made by him which were much more remarkable in every way. Usually the gun gets the credit for the work, but you will occasionally meet one of them who will give you to understand that it is pure skill that does the business.

Now I have made many long shots, some very long ones—for when in pursuit of grouse I shoot almost regardless of distance, for I believe that the sound of the whistling lead has a tendency to make them lie closer, and I have occasionally brought one down at a very great distance—but I never arrogated to myself any special skill, or gave my gun credit for being better than other guns, as nearly all guns will throw shot a long distance, and, if a pellet chances to strike a vital spot that is unprotected, it will sometimes kill at a distance that seems incredible, but the great trouble in this long range shooting is that the charge becomes so scattered that it is very seldom that a bird is hit in just the right spot to bring it down.

The man who criticizes the actions of your dog will perhaps come as near as any one to your ideal of a good fellow to leave at home. The work of your dog is a subject sacred to you alone, and even though you may well know that your dog is one of the most ill-behaved brutes that ever went afield, your dander is up at the first word in disparagement of his actions. The more the adverse criticism is deserved, the worse you feel about it; for when you have a good dog and fault is found with him, you console yourself with the thought that your companion is trying to impress you with the idea that he knows it all, and in either event the result in your mind is the same: so far as this man is concerned the offense is never repeated, for he will never have opportunity.

As I have previously mentioned, the man who handles his gun carelessly, either when carrying it or when shooting, should not be allowed to repeat the performance in your presence. Shun him as you would a pestilence, for your life is in danger every second that you are in his company. It will also be impossible for you to shoot in anything like good form with your nerves in the condition they will most assuredly be after you have had opportunity to look down into the gun barrels of your companion, and those same nerves will receive a still more violent shock when that gun is unexpectedly discharged within a foot of your ear, or when you receive in some sensitive part of your anatomy a portion of the charge; and even when fortunate enough to escape actual contact with the hurtling lead, the whistle of the charge as it passes by, or the patter of the shot among the branches near you, exercises anything but a steadying or soothing influence upon the sensitive tissues that so arbitrarily determine the result of your shooting.

The man who is constantly shouting to his dog is by no means a desirable companion, for the racket, aside from the annoyance it causes you, is sure to mar the sport by making the birds wild, and if your own dog is with you he must be thoroughly well trained and an old campaigner as well, or the continual shouting will most assuredly break him up.

The man who kicks his dog is a brute, and he who punishes his dog without cause, or too severely, is another, and neither should be allowed opportunity to exhibit his brutish instincts in the presence of sportsmen. I know that some men when they miss a bird consider it the proper thing to kick or thrash the dog, and as they may perhaps think that the provocation justifies their course, I hasten to assure them that this performance most decidedly comes under the rule above laid down. Your dog is the companion of your sport, the promoter and sharer of your pleasure, and no sportsman will abuse him.

Agreeable conversation is a most delightful adjunct to your day's sport, provided your companion knows when to talk as well as the proper time to keep silent. The man who will talk when approaching the haunts of game will quickly lose prestige as an agreeable fellow and soon find that desirable companions are becoming scarce, notwithstanding his best efforts to entertain and amuse them.

The man who constantly inflicts upon you his ill-timed advice will also soon find that, for some reason undreamed of by him, he is obliged to take his outing alone. No matter how appropriate the advice he may offer, nor how well deserved his words of censure, there is something in your nature as well as in mine that ill brooks anything of this kind right on top of the smart of the wound caused by failure. The very fact that you know his points well taken only adds to your discomfort and confirms your disinclination to enjoy any more of this.

I once made the acquaintance of a jolly good fellow, who was said to be a good shot and well up in the science of woodcraft, but as the game season had just closed I was obliged to wait a long time before I had opportunity to judge of this; meantime I met him quite often, and the better I knew him the more I liked him, and as the liking appeared to be mutual, we were soon on the best of terms, and when at last the day came when we could get away together we started with high hopes for the haunts of the birds.

My first shot was comparatively an easy one, but somehow I missed with both barrels, and was greatly surprised to hear my companion with a confident manner assert that I fired too quickly with my first barrel and not soon enough with the second; and then he gave in an arrogant manner the rules and customs governing shots of that nature until I was disgusted, not so much at what he said as at the manner in which he said it, but following my usual practice in such cases I said nothing. The next shot also came to me as I was going around the dog to drive the bird he was pointing to him. I had just turned toward him when a grouse flushed behind me, and as I was now braced up, I whirled and dropped it with, as I thought, rather a pretty snap shot; but my companion was still in a critical mood, for he again rated me for shooting so quickly, and he also gave me to understand that by shooting in this manner I would miss nearly all my shots, while the birds I chanced to kill would be so badly torn as to be nearly worthless. I was considerably nettled, but said nothing, and took a few steps toward him and put up the woodcock in front of the dog. The bird flew about as we had calculated upon and he had a fair shot and brought it down. "There!" he exclaimed, "that is the proper way to do it," and then came more rules governing this style of shot until I was tired, but I kept silent and patiently stood the racket two or three times more, when I decided that there had been about enough of this.

As I thought that he was worth saving, considering that he was otherwise an excellent companion, I determined to make an effort and try to reform him. So upon his next shot I straightened up, and assuming the self-opinionated tone and arrogant style that he had used, I soundly rated him for twisting his body around instead of gracefully turning on his heel and facing the bird, assuring him in the most pompous tone that I could command that this style was now obsolete, and that no sportsman with any claim to being up to the mark ever committed this very serious fault, and then I gave him hail Columbia for dropping his bird in a mud hole when he should have had the wit to have pulled a little quicker and landed it on the turf; then I switched off on to the very awkward manner in which he handled his gun and gave him object lessons as to what was proper as well as improper in this line, until I had roasted him for fully five minutes. You should have seen him as he stood there taking it. When I began his eyes opened to their widest extent, and a look of surprise came over him that almost broke me up; then, as I continued, his face flushed up as though he was getting mad, but when I went through the evolutions, in order to show him how to handle his gun, he caught on; a broad smile stole over his countenance, which broke out into a hearty laugh as he crossed over to me and with a cordial handshake thanked me for the lesson and assured me that I should never have occasion to repeat it; and I never did, for he was really a capital fellow, and neither of us ever had cause to regret the object lesson that was the foundation of a lasting friendship that brought to us many happy days among the birds. I afterward learned that this habit came to him through coaching a younger brother, and until I placed the matter before him in a proper light he had not the slightest suspicion that his criticisms were distasteful.

In this connection I wish to say that the sportsman, especially if he is lacking in experience, should carefully guard against forming habits of this kind, that may cause his companion annoyance, or subject himself to ridicule.

The best school in this branch of the beginner's education is the companionship of older hands at the business, if he will carefully study and profit by what he may see and hear in striving to emulate desirable traits and studiously refraining from repeating any word or performing any act that had better not be said or done. He should also carefully guard against committing any little mannerism practiced by his companions that strikes him as being at all singular, and while upon this subject it will be profitable for him to take account of stock and see if he can find anything of this nature in his own conduct, and if he discovers anything, to make instant and thorough reform if he would escape the ridicule of his companions.

The sportsman's world is not composed of just so much of this and just so little of that, with a certain well-known quantity of the other, but is mainly made up of little things, both good and bad, that surround and dovetail into the more important features, all rounding up into a beautiful whole, when main incidents and trivial happenings go smoothly and pleasantly hand in hand, but resulting in flat failure when jars and jolts or inharmonious clashings are the order of the day. The beginner should therefore study well the lesson he must learn if he would contribute his share to the fund of enjoyment that should crown with an undimmed halo of happiness each day devoted to the delightful sports of the field.

Many acts that are incompatible with the spirit of good-fellowship will be instictively avoided by the sportsman whose heart is in the right place, while those that he may inadvertently or through ignorance commit will not be repeated when he learns that they cause the slightest annoyance to his companion. He will also instinctively perform many little acts that will add to the pleasure of his friends, and never grow weary of doing all in his power to make others happy. How pleasing to the sportsman—be he expert or tyro—who has scant opportunity for sport, to go afield with a congenial companion, who unassumingly so arranges matters that an abundant share of sport comes to him, and as he is gracefully assigned the post of honor and sees that his friend is doing his best to give him the shot, there is a feeling deep down in his heart that fairly rivals the pleasure of successful sport, and he mentally decides that his companion is that prince of good fellows, a sportsman with his heart in the right place. How much more enjoyable also is the day to him who thus ministers to the pleasure of his companion, and were there no other compensation than the satisfaction that he feels while performing the friendly office, his reward is ample. "It is not all of shooting to shoot," and the ideal sportsman ever finds in the incidental belongings of his days afield abundant source of pleasure and enjoyment that never comes to him who measures his joy or sorrow by the number or result of his shots.

The description I have given of some of the pitfalls and stumbling blocks that often engulf or overthrow the would-be sportsman is for the benefit and guidance of the beginner who is really a good fellow at heart, in order that he may not inadvertently plunge into the oblivion of the former or meet with ridicule by tripping over the latter, trusting that the points I have given, aided by his own good sense of what is proper, will bring him safely through the tangled thicket to the inviting covers and beautiful fields beyond, where, secure in the respect and esteem of congenial companions, blissful days of glorious sport await his pleasure.

I now resign my very pleasant task as instructor and extend to you a cordial invitation to accompany me while I revisit the scenes where I first became a student of the art, trusting that the description I shall give of the many difficulties that I encountered and the manner in which I surmounted them will be of assistance to you in overcoming anything of like nature that may come to you, until you are a perfect master of the fascinating art.

CHAPTER VIII.

Among the Birds.

I trust that our retrospective rambles amid the scenes and through the well-stocked covers of long ago may not prove to be entirely barren of pleasure as well as benefit to you, and that you will forgive the manner in which I may shift the scenes or the sequence in which I may describe some of the incidents. We will take down the old flintlock musket, load up, return ramrod, prime, shut pan and take a fair start.

I shall never forget my first shot at a flying bird. Many thousands have since fallen to my gun, but never one of them so beautiful to me as this, and the memory of many a day of abundant sport is but an evanescent vision when compared with that supreme moment.

The previous day, while squirrel hunting, I had met the late Ethan Allin, who invited me to accompany him in pursuit of a large covey of grouse that I had flushed a short time before. Accepting the invitation with pleasure, we were soon on the ground, and as a grouse rose near us Ethan very deliberately brought his gun in position and pulled trigger, when the bird collapsed.

I remained with him until night and had the pleasure of witnessing the doubling up of several more of these royal birds. This was the first time that I had seen a bird shot on the wing, and as I wended my way homeward I thought the matter over and resolved that I would learn the art, if it was possible.

The next morning, taking my usual allowance of a pound of No. 4 shot and a quarter of a pound of powder, I shouldered my old flintlock musket, and with Milo, my squirrel dog, started for the woods. Arriving at my chosen ground, an almost circular alder run, I sent Milo into the lower end, while I cut across nearly to the upper end near some woods. Milo was soon in full cry after a rabbit, while I stood with every nerve at its utmost tension and the old gun in position at full cock, expecting at every second that the dog would flush a grouse, but none started until he was nearly opposite me, when a noble bird rose just below and not more than a dozen yards from me, and flew past me toward the woods. It has always seemed to me that I was perfectly cool and calm. At all events I brought the old gun to my shoulder, took a good aim, and, following the bird, cut loose and tumbled it as handsomely as even Mr. Allin could have done. Although I have a vivid recollection of the event as a most delightful whole, somehow the details of what transpired after the bird fell are rather hazy.

I distinctly remember breaking shot, throwing down the old gun, and gathering my bird, and even now, after the lapse of many decades, I recall the incident with no small portion of the ecstatic bliss that then filled my heart.

While searching for my gun I was joined by a young friend who asserted that I had been "hollering and singing fit to raise the dead," but, of course, I denied this, until I caught a glimpse of old Milo as he stood looking at me with his head on one side and one ear turned wrong side out, when I became partly convinced that there might be some little grain of truth in the statement of my companion, and abruptly changed the course of the conversation by proposing that he should go along and see me bring down a few more of the beauties.

Carefully pecking the flint and wiping out the pan of my trusty gun, I poured in the proper charge of powder, and ramming well home a generous wad of tow, I dropped into the barrel a T. D. pipe bowl full of shot, and lightly rammed down on them a wad of hornet's nest; then pouring into the pan a trifle of powder I "shut pan" and we started for another run a short distance away.

I would like to skip a week here, but as the record of my experience may be consoling to others, it will perhaps be as well to jot it down.

My second shot was made while I was standing —dancing, my companion said—right in the middle of a vast multitude of grouse that got up with thunderous roar all around me, and so completely rattled was I that I had to try the old gun with the ramrod before I was convinced that I had fired it off. Following up the birds into the open woods, I expended every grain of powder and every pellet of shot without disturbing a single feather. As the remarks of my companion had not the slightest bearing upon the subject, I shall omit them, merely stating the fact that he was not a sportsman.

On my way home I thought the matter over and came to the conclusion that the birds had put up a job on me to get me confused and thus distract my aim, in which they had succeeded most admirably.

The next morning, with my usual allowance of ammunition, I returned to the ground and was soon among the grouse; but, I regret to add, I again expended all of my ammunition and returned home without a feather to show.

The following day this was repeated until nearly night, when a covey of birds was flushed by the dog some distance below me, and as they passed by I took a deliberate aim at one of them and fired—when, much to my surprise, a bird tumbled stone dead that was at least six feet behind the one I had shot at. This set me to thinking, and I decided that the old flintlock was too slow, both for me as well as the birds, and I determined to have it altered over for percussion caps. The next day I walked six miles to the nearest gunsmith and waited until he had finished the job, After considerable practice at a mark, I became somewhat accustomed to the change and found it to be a great improvement, and with renewed courage and hope I again started for the haunts of the grouse. Profiting by previous experience and determined to succeed, I soon learned to keep cool, which is, in fact, the most important requisite in the entire list of accomplishments possessed by the expert shot. Meantime I used the utmost care to cover my bird before shooting, and, although many of them would be far out of shot before my aim was satisfactory, I soon had the pleasure of bringing down an occasional bird, and my belief that accident or luck was not in the least responsible for the result added no little to my enjoyment.

At the end of a month I could kill one out of three shots, accepting none, however, that were not fairly good, as birds were very plentiful, and often at this time I brought to bag from six to ten birds in a day. As I had only two or three days each week, I consider this to have been a very good showing, especially as I was not by any means what might be called a natural shot, and

I was far from steady under fire when the fun became a bit exciting. I was also troubled with weak eyes, and in dense woods or on dark days I could not see my birds more than a few yards away, and consequently I scored many misses as well as lost opportunities.

At this time all my practice had been at flying birds, as I had given no thought to any other method and had not received the slightest help from any source in the way of advice. In fact, with the exception of Mr. Allin, I knew of no one who was capable of giving me any instruction as to the proper course to pursue, and to him I would not apply, for it was a pet idea of mine to withhold from him all knowledge of my efforts to learn to shoot and to appear before him some day his equal in skill. This idea, I am pleased to say, was carried out to the very letter, greatly to his surprise and much to my delight.

CHAPTER IX.

Skipping Stones and Flying Birds.

One day, while out shooting, I came to the shore of a little pond where some boys were skipping flat stones over the surface of the water, and I at once decided that here was an opportunity for practice that would undoubtedly be of benefit to me, and no sooner was my first shot fired than I hugged myself with delight, for here was just the practice I so greatly needed. Shooting down on the water, I could plainly see just where the charge struck, as well as just where the target was at the time, thus in a simple manner obtaining very valuable information as to the reason for many a miss that I could not account for, as up to this time I had felt reasonably sure that I was holding on the birds all right and had blamed the old gun for a large share of the misses.

A few shots at these flat stones skimming along the surface of the water most effectually dispelled this illusion, as I found that I was invariably shooting behind; for even when the target appeared to be struck, the main portion of the charge was still well to the rear of it. Realizing that I did not follow up the target properly, and that I was also rather inclined to check the motion of the gun at the instant of firing, I at once set out to overcome these defects, and by constant practice an hour or so each day, I became at the end of a week fairly expert, both in hitting the target as well as in greater rapidity in finding it over the gun barrel.

One summer day while practicing at these targets there were several boys taking turns in skipping the stones, when at one time, as I gave the word, each one of the little beggars let go a stone with all the force at his command, thus giving me a whole flock to choose from. Although I was thrown a bit off my balance by the unexpected change in the programme, I steadied myself, and, selecting one near the center of the group, I pulled for it and was gratified to see that the target was well in the center of the charge. This gave me another idea, and as the boys were much better pleased than when throwing singly, I continued this practice until I became quite expert, both in selecting and hitting the stones, taking them from any position in the group I decided upon before giving the word.

I then instructed the boys to use their own judgment and throw at any time after I had loaded and cocked my gun. This was the best practice of all, for the little rascals tried their best to deceive and confuse me by throwing the instant my gun was cocked; or, waiting a long time, apparently skylarking and paying no attention to the business on hand, when suddenly with a deafening yell they would deliver their fire, or make false motions, and an instant later the stones would go skipping by, often untouched and sometimes not even fired at until I became accustomed to the method.

After a little practice, however, I could acquit myself in a very satisfactory manner and was soon an excellent shot at these targets, and longed for the open season to come that I might put to the test upon the swift-winged grouse the worth of the system of training I had so persistently practiced.

Although at this time there were no game laws worth mentioning, and I had never seen a sportsman's paper, I had learned from others that it was unsportsmanlike to kill game until the first of September, and, although strongly tempted, somehow I could not break the rule that I had adopted.

At last the long-looked-for day arrived, and with bounding pulse and happy heart I shouldered the old gun, and with Milo barking and capering around me I started for the well-known grouse covers.

I had, in my practice during the summer, discovered that No. 8 shot were much better in every way than the 4's, and consequently I had discarded these, first for 6's and shortly after for 8's. As I had thoroughly tested their killing power upon crows and blackbirds in a neighbor's cornfield, I started in that morning with no disturbing doubts as to the shooting qualities of my gun or the killing power of my ammunition.

Arriving at my chosen ground, Milo soon had a nice covey of grouse in the air, but they rose a long way out of shot and flew into a piece of open woods, where I at once followed them. Just before I arrived at the woods, in going through a large patch of whortleberry bushes, a large covey of grouse rose quite unexpectedly from under my feet and all around me, and I quickly brought the gun to my shoulder, covered a straightaway bird and pulled; but just at this instant a bird, which had sprung nearly under the one I had marked for my own, rose above and a little to one side, and while in the very act of pulling trigger to a sure aim I shifted to get on to this one, and, of course, lost them both. Then I sat down on a stone and gave myself a sadly needed lecture.

"You poor, weak mortal," said I, "here you have been all summer in constant practice at this very shot, and because you could once in a while hit a senseless stone, you foolishly imagined that the world of sport was all your own. Why in the name of all that is sensible did you quit that low-flying straightaway bird, that you would surely have tumbled, for that uncertain rocket that you would undoubtedly have missed anyway? Truly I am heartily ashamed of you, and am very glad that those boys were not here to witness the tumble of their idol."

This rating, I think, did me good. At all events I felt easier in my mind, and as I resumed my course I firmly resolved—oh! how many times have I since then also firmly resolved—that, come or go in whatever shape or condition they might, I would keep cool and never, never get rattled again.

Following the birds into the woods, I soon flushed one, and, taking a quick but deliberate aim, I had the satisfaction of seeing it double up when I pulled. This successful shot helped me wonderfully. I had kept perfectly cool, and, from the rise of the bird until I saw it collapse in the air, I had felt perfectly sure of the result.

This cool assurance that your aim is true, and the feeling that your bird is surely doomed, will almost invariably result in success, and the persevering cultivation of this very desirable confidence is the best possible course that you can pursue while striving for perfection in the use of the gun. Indeed, I do not believe that any one can become even a passable shot with this confidence lacking, for the very fact that one has any doubt as to the result shows that his aim is not quite up to the mark, and his intended victim will go scot free unless a stray pellet accidentally scores a bird that really is not deserved. The conviction that this was the keynote to success flashed upon my mind before my bird had struck the ground, and I then and there again firmly resolved that, come what might, I would keep always cool and cover my bird. Truth compels me to add, however, that within a minute I forgot all about it, and shot at least three feet under a very lively bird that rose with a dreadful racket just behind me, and went into the air like a rocket. If the bird did this to rattle me, he deserved hearty congratulation for accomplishing his purpose in a most thorough manner, as I was completely unnerved and most disgracefully missed several easy shots. Finally, after missing a straightaway bird, I again brought the old gun in position, and, as there was nothing in it, I found no trouble in obtaining a perfect aim.

This gave me an idea, and as I could hit nothing in the condition my nerves were then in, I at once acted upon this idea, and loading up the gun I left it at half cock, resolved that I would not fire at another bird until I had steadied myself by taking deliberate aim at them when they rose, but with no possibility of shooting when I pulled trigger. This course of proceeding brought me round all right, and after three or four rises that I had found no trouble in covering to my entire satisfaction, I cocked my gun and brought down four birds in succession as handsomely as one could wish.

From that day up to the present time I have practiced this course, for my own benefit as well as for that of the many beginners who have come to me for instruction, and always with the best results.

I well remember testing the efficacy of a similar method upon the late B. F. Bowles. He was an ardent sportsman, a capital companion and a fair shot, so long as he kept cool. But he would get excited and then the misses were piled up in a very unsatisfactory manner.

One day we were working out an extensive woodcock cover, and had separated in order to cover the ground and save time, when I heard his gun several times in rapid succession, and shortly after came the well-known signal that I was wanted. Crossing over to him, I found him seated on a large hummock wiping the perspiration from his face.

"Why!" said I, "you look as though you had lost a friend."

"I have," said he, "several of them."

It appeared that he had walked into a bevy of quail that were scattered, and as they got up one or two at a time he blazed away "regardless," without touching a feather.

"Now," said he, "those birds are just below here, and I want you to show them that their very reprehensible practice of getting up behind one and buzzing over one's head is not to be tolerated for a moment."

This I thought a good opportunity to test the course that had proved to be of such benefit to me in similar cases, and explaining the matter to him, he gladly consented to try it. Taking three or four of his shells, I cut them open and emptied the shot on the ground, and placing one in his gun I bade him take sure aim at the first bird that rose and pull trigger as soon as he was sure that the bird was covered.

I had found that this plan was better than to leave the hammer at half cock. Of course, he realized that the fact that there was no possibility of a kill would greatly assist in steadying his sadly demoralized nerves. I could plainly see that he was rapidly recovering his self-possession, as I explained to him the benefit of the course proposed.

Following up the birds, we soon obtained a point, when I took a position a little to one side and bade my companion flush the bird and shoot when well on. Walking in ahead of the dog, he soon had the bird in the air, and coolly bringing his gun into position he cut loose, and, as he was ever a quick shot, the bird was not far away and I brought it down. Turning to me with beaming countenance, he exclaimed: "Your prescription works to a charm. My nerves were perfectly calm and I am absolutely sure that I could have killed that bird stone dead, but," added he with not quite so much enthusiasm, "perhaps it will be as well to follow up the practice a few shots more to make sure."

Soon finding another bird, the same course was pursued with the same result, and he was more than pleased with the steadying influence of the practice.

As I loaded his gun the third time I slyly substituted one of my own shells for the one charged only with powder, and was greatly pleased to see him cut down a twisting bird as handsomely as the most expert shot could have done.

Judging from his appearance that his nerves were not quite so steady as I could wish, I explained to him that some of the shot must have remained in the shell, and the fact that he killed the bird was proof that he was holding on all right, but I thought that still further practice would be necessary in order to get him in proper condition. I therefore took a shell, and removing the shot showed him that there were none left, but when I loaded his gun I again substituted one of my shells, and was well pleased to see him coolly and deliberately bring down his bird in capital style.

"There!" he enthusiastically exclaimed, "I have learned more about shooting within the past few minutes than I have in all my life before, and if I can only keep cool there will be no further trouble."

He did keep cool and bagged two more, and I began to have strong hopes of him, but as he was getting on to the next one, a bird with a most inexcusable racket rose from under his feet, and, flying almost in his face, so rattled him that he shot more than twenty feet away from the mark.

I shall never forget the expression on his countenance as he turned to me and exclaimed: "I am ashamed of myself and I wish you would draw the shot from about twenty-five shells, and by the time I have expended them I think I may be able to get into gear again."

Although Mr. Bowles was greatly benefited by this course, in that he was enabled by the practice to soon recover from his unsteadiness, he never failed to go to pieces when there was an unexpected rise, and a miss would also nearly always throw him off his balance.

It was an easy matter to make a pretty accurate guess as to the state of his mind as well as the result of his shooting by listening to the report of his gun. Did we hear two or three squibs we knew that the birds had the best of it, and that his nerves were again making him unhappy, but when we heard the proper report from the gun we felt assured that he was holding his own.

I have taken his case to illustrate the benefit to be derived by following this course by those who, like him, sometimes go to pieces when things get a little exciting.

The practice at the skipping stones I found to be of very great assistance to me when shooting at crossing birds, and I soon became fairly expert in bringing down my birds under these conditions. Previous to this practice I had been all at sea when taking such shots.

Of course, in straightaway shots the conditions are very different, and all that is necessary is to get on to the bird and be sure that you do not destroy your aim by pulling the gun out of position when you fire.

One reason for my many misses at crossing shots was that I was inclined to dwell too long on my aim, or, in the expressive slang of the present day, I was a "poky" shot, and, like many others I have since met who belong to this class, I often poked the gun off the mark at the instant of firing; but, thanks to the practice at the skipping stones, I soon got the better of this bad habit, and learned to quickly catch sight of my birds over the barrel, and to pull trigger the instant my aim was sure. I was soon a very fair shot in open ground, but when the cover was dense I was not quick enough to get on to my birds to do good work, and as there was a great deal of such cover encountered nearly every day, I made up my mind that I would get the best of this difficulty if it were possible.

The next summer all the time that I could spare was devoted to practice, mainly with the skipping stones; but my improvement did not satisfy me, and I was constantly studying to find something that was better than the practice I was having.

There was a shed near the lower end of the pond, some little distance from the place where we usually practiced, and one day we took refuge in it from a shower. While I was standing in the front part of the shed, looking out of the back door, which opened toward the water, a bird flew past and the problem was solved. I could hardly wait for the rain to cease, so anxious was I to test the value of my discovery, and as soon as I could persuade the boys to start I sent them to the bank of the pond below the shed to throw stones from there past the door, while I stood in the shed ready to shoot at the targets as they passed by.

At the first trial I saw that this was just what I wanted, for I could see the stone only while it was passing the open door, and at the distance I stood from it nothing but very quick work would do the business. In fact, I found it altogether too quick for me, and was obliged to move up fully half way to the door before I could get on; but I persevered, and it was not long before I could stand back ten feet from the door and do capital work.

Experience taught me to keep both eyes wide open, and to keep them steadfastly fixed upon the place where the stone would pass, and as soon as it made its appearance to follow it closely with my eyes and instantly bring my gun in position, pulling the very instant that the butt came to my shoulder, without the slightest attempt to take aim or giving any thought to the matter whatever.

By following this practice for a short time, I became quite an expert snap shot, and as soon as the season for game opened I sought out the most dense thickets, and after I had gotten over my "stage fright" and become a little accustomed to getting a quick sight at the birds I was greatly surprised, as well as delighted, to find that I was really an excellent shot, doing much better work than I had been able to do the previous season in comparatively open shooting.

This in reality was my third season, counting from my first bird, although the first season did not amount to much.

The second season I had worked hard and taken much practice, and I considered the time well spent, as I had laid the foundation on good solid ground, and was now further advanced in the art than I had ever believed to be possible. I was by no means a natural shot, as I have before explained, and had no one to advise me as to the best method of procedure, but had to dig it all out by myself.

CHAPTER X.

In the Field.

I have already mentioned that it was, from the first, my ambition to master the art of wing shooting and then to show Ethan Allin that I was his equal, and as I now thought that I could readily do this, I determined to have a try for it at all events. The next time we met I told him of some new ground I had found where there were lots of grouse, or "pats," as he called them, and invited him to go with me the next day and gather a few.

Although I saw Ethan quite often and was well acquainted with him, I had never fired a gun in his presence, contenting myself with watching him and his dogs when we chanced to meet in the field, and he knew very little about my shooting. He was a good shot, and fairly quick, and it was a favorite joke of his to call up a companion, especially if he thought him to be a little green at the business, and place him in position when the dogs were on point and tell him to shoot the bird, and when all was ready he would flush the bird and kill it himself before his companion could get on. I had seen him do this upon one occasion, and heard him tell of other instances, and I was just aching to have him try it on me, as I had confidence in my ability to get as much fun out of this game as would fall to his share.

The next morning Ethan drove to my home, accompanied by a friend, Mr. Roosevelt, of New York, who had come to shoot with him. Whether it was Mr. Robert B. Roosevelt, or his brother Cornelius, I cannot recall. When we arrived at the cover both of them found fault because the thicket was so dense, but I did not tell them that it was for this reason I had selected it, but gave them to understand that there were birds enough to offset any difficulty of that nature, and this was soon demonstrated to their satisfaction.

Before we were fairly out of the wagon, more than twenty grouse rose near us and flew into the swamp beyond. Mr. Allin had two dogs, old Tip—only she was young then—and a red dog that was not under good control, and therefore was kept at heel most of the time, Tip doing nearly all the work and doing it well.

Following a cart path in the direction taken by the birds, Tip was soon on point, nearly hidden from sight in the thicket. In fact, all we could see of her was about a foot of her tail with its white tip—which gave her her name—and as we came to her I saw Ethan nudge his companion as he proposed to me to go around to the right of the dog and then turn in front of her and flush the bird and kill it, saying that, as it was my ground, I ought to have the first shot. Now I knew as well as he did that this course of procedure would drive the bird into the cart path, and I also knew that he intended to take the shot he so generously offered me; but I was pretty well braced up, and walked into the thicket and put up the bird, which started for the cart path, but it never got there until I picked it up and carried it out.

When I joined my companions I could see that Ethan was a little chagrined, while his friend appeared to be pleased about it, as the corners of his mouth were twitching and his eyes snapped as though he enjoyed it.

Tip soon had another one fast some little distance from the cart path, and as we came to her

Ethan took position at her left and a little in advance of her, and bade me go into the thicket to the right a few yards and put up the bird and kill it; but I knew by the satisfied air with which he glanced at the dense tangle of the thicket that he thought he had a sure thing this time. I had no fears for the result, as the cover was so dense that the bird would be obliged to go nearly straight in the air and would give me the first chance. So, with a good grip on the old gun, I entered the thicket and soon had the bird in the air. Just as she was breaking into the opening I cut her down. Just an instant before I pulled, another bird flushed and was not over six feet behind my bird when it fell, causing this one to swerve from its course, which brought it into the opening not twenty feet from Ethan, who missed it with both barrels, and Mr. Roosevelt "wiped his eye."

Now, if there was anything that Ethan particularly liked to do to others, and most decidedly disliked to have others do to him, it was this very thing; so when I joined them he was in a state of mind that, I am ashamed to say, afforded me more satisfaction than did my two excellent shots. Mr. Roosevelt was also in ecstasies, and he chaffed Ethan unmercifully, telling me that he was paying off old scores. You should have seen them when I showed my bird, as both of them supposed that I had missed the one he had killed. Ethan gazed at it with a blank look of astonishment, while Mr. Roosevelt fairly boiled over with merriment, and exclaimed: "Ethan, the boy can beat you all to pieces." I need scarcely say that these words from such a source filled my heart to overflowing. Here was the perfect realization of my hopes and dreams for the past three years. Indeed, I had succeeded even better than I had ever hoped or dreamed; but I was ever modest and retiring, and I bore my honors meekly and in all ways conducted myself with proper regard for the amenities.

After this I took no shots, even that belonged to me, when there was a possibility that either of my companions could shoot, and only took those that I was perfectly sure could only be seen by me.

At the next point, Ethan placed me where I knew as well as he did that no bird would ever come; then properly placing his companion, he flushed the bird and missed it, and soon after he missed another, showing that he was badly excited, or, as Mr. Roosevelt said, "All broke up." Nor did he recover himself that day, for he missed every shot, greatly to the delight of Mr. Roosevelt, who took advantage of every miss to pay off old scores, as Ethan was always joking and chaffing his companions when anything of this nature occurred that gave him opportunity.

Mr. Roosevelt was a fairly good shot, and killed several birds. I took seven shots in all and scored every time. One of these was in a dense pine thicket that we were crossing, where the open space from the ground to the mat of interlaced branches was not more than four feet, and as a grouse flushed some ten yards in front of me, I threw the gun to my shoulder and killed her clean before she had time to reach the shelter of the branches overhead. Mr. Roosevelt pronounced this a wonderful shot, and as the dog brought in the bird Ethan took it and handed it to me, saying, "That was a cracker"; then he frankly added that I was the best brush shot he had ever seen, and gave me a cordial and pressing invitation to accompany Mr. Roosevelt and himself the next day; but, as I had already made an engagement, we agreed upon another day, and, from that time until the day of his death, better friend I never had.

Upon my return home from this, my first appearance in public, as it were, it was some time before I became calm enough to review the events of the day in anything like a rational manner. My thoughts were in a complete whirl, and the different events of the day were all so jumbled up that it was impossible for me to unravel them. I could only realize that the delightful whole was something indescribable, and that I was supremely happy.

After I had become a little more rational and was capable of thinking somewhat calmly of the various incidents of the day, I well remember that two of its very prominent features were so strongly impressed upon my mind that I could scarcely wait until the next day to consummate a trade that I had under way for a double-barreled gun. I also well remember that before sunrise the next morning my watch and four bright half dollars were in the pockets of the village carpenter, and I was on my way home with that double-barreled gun.

The other prominent feature was Tip, but here I could see no way out of the difficulty. Setters were scarce; in fact, I knew of none except those of Ethan's and his friends, and as the price even of a puppy was beyond my means, I was perforce obliged to wait.

But the double gun was an accomplished fact, and I was eager to test its merits, about which I knew nothing, as in my anxiety to secure the treasure I had not thought to ask a single question. Nor had I been told anything about it. All I knew was, that the gun weighed six pounds and was 20-gauge. The six pounds I could understand, but the 20-gauge was Greek to me. I could see, however, that the bore was very small, and at once decided that the charges that I had been using in the old musket would not answer for this one, and determined that I would at once experiment until I had found the proper load. I had an appointment for that day with my friend the doctor, and when he came I showed him the gun, and as he looked at the bore and asked what gauge it was I comprehended the meaning of the word.

This gun was about the same length in stock as my old one, but there was nearly three-quarters of an inch more drop, and I soon found, by bringing it to my shoulder, that it fitted me much better than the one I had been using; but, of course, I then knew nothing in relation to this matter of the fit of the gun. In fact, I was entirely ignorant of a great many things that would have spared me much hard work, could I have had some one with experience to advise me as to the proper course. There was no one whom I could ask for information except Ethan, and, although we were the best of friends, somehow the old feeling of reserve that I had harbored for the previous three years still had influence over me, and I also had no little of the false pride that I have previously mentioned. So I asked no questions, but worked my way out of any difficulty that I encountered as best I could, although I well knew that Ethan would have assisted me with the greatest pleasure.

The doctor was a natural shot, and up to this time was my superior in open shooting, although he had shot his first bird under my instruction the previous season, and upon nearly all the questions that bothered me he was as much at sea as myself. He, however, had none of the false pride that troubled me, and was not ashamed to ask questions, or confess his ignorance, and I was occasionally greatly surprised to find that he was well posted on some point that had given me considerable trouble to solve, simply for the reason that he had asked for the information, while I had experimented—often the hardest way—and dug it out by main strength.

Now I had been deeply studying all the morning about the proper charge for my new gun, as I well knew that the 3¼ drams of powder and 1¼ ounces of shot that I had been shooting in the old gun would not answer at all for this one, and, although I had at once decided to make experiments in order to find out the proper charge, I was greatly bothered to determine just the charge to use in beginning the test.

When I told the doctor that I should use the old gun until I had made the experiment, he at once replied that, as his gun was 14-gauge, and he used 2¾ drams of powder and 1⅛ ounces of shot, he thought that a little smaller charge would answer for mine, and advised that I try a charge of 2½ drams of powder and an ounce of shot. This struck me as sensible, and I at once loaded up. Pinning two sheets of newspaper against the garden fence, I stepped off twenty-five yards and fired at them. I was greatly pleased to find that the little gun did not kick nearly so hard as the old one, and when we examined the targets both of us were delighted with the even pattern.

I still retain a vivid recollection of the deep feelings of sorrow and regret that came over me as I realized that the old gun that had done me such good service, and brought to me so many happy hours, would never again be my companion. But these feelings soon gave place to pride and joy in the possession of its successful rival, and, as I fondly gazed upon it and brought it to my shoulder, I decided that it would take many watches and many bright half dollars to part us. Throwing it over my shoulder, we started for a favorite cover.

Our shooting this day was nearly all in alder runs. As the doctor had only an occasional day, I always gave him all the shots that I could, by sending him ahead to points of vantage, while Milo and I beat up the run toward him, taking no shots that were going his way.

It was therefore some time before I obtained a shot, but finally a bird rose partly behind me, and as I had given the matter much thought, I brought the gun to my shoulder, and taking the necessary precaution to obtain a perfect aim, I tumbled it in a manner that was entirely satisfactory. At the crack of the gun another bird rose near and went in the same direction, but I never thought of the other barrel until the bird was out of sight. This lost opportunity nettled me not a little, but I now believe that it was for the best, for I brooded over it until it struck in deep, and in consequence I do not remember that anything of the kind has ever happened me since.

My next two shots were also straightaway, and I brought down the birds in good style; but my fourth shot taught me a lesson, or rather it showed me that I had a lesson yet to learn.

In crossing a run, I became somewhat tangled up in the dense growth, when a grouse rose from almost under my feet, and I gathered myself together as quickly as possible, and catching sight of the bird, threw my gun to my shoulder and made a snap shot at it and missed. Then I took a quick but sure aim and brought it down with the second barrel.

This performance satisfied me that I could do no successful snap shooting until I had got the hang of the gun; so the next morning I began practice at a stationary target, and found that I was shooting at least two feet too low, but I soon learned to pitch the butt of the gun a little lower, and in a short time I could do very good work at the target, and could also do well among the birds, so long as I did not forget that I was handling my new gun.

Soon after I became the owner of this gun, my old playmate, Charles, gained the consent of his mother to allow him to go shooting with me, and she purchased for him a double-barreled gun. He and I had been fast friends for several years, and he had been with me quite often when I was practicing, and had often taken a shot with the old gun, but had never been with me after game, as his mother feared that he would get shot, and forbade his going. But Charles was getting to be a bit unsteady, and, as I was away shooting, he sought other companions, and some of them were not quite up to the standard fixed upon by his mother, and this worried her not a little. So she took counsel of my father, and he advised her to buy the boy a gun, and let him go shooting with his boy, telling her that worse things could happen to a boy than to have his head blown off, and that he felt perfectly satisfied to have his boy go shooting, as he then knew just where he was and what he was doing, and that there was nothing like a day's tramp in the woods to keep a boy in the house nights.

This last point completely broke down her objection to shooting, and the result was that Charles, very much to his surprise and satisfaction, when next he asked her if he could go with me received a favorable answer. In a few days he asked her for a gun, and was still more surprised to learn that she had already ordered a bran-new double-barrel from the city.

Perhaps it will be well for me to add that in after years, when the mother of Charles saw the moral and physical wreck of some of the companions that he forsook for the pleasures of woodland sports, in comparison with the robust form of her respected and dearly loved son, she devoutly blessed the day that brought to her the words of wisdom, that pointed out the path that led the pride of her heart to moral and physical health, and herself to a fond mother's paradise.

Charles was impulsive and wanted to start for the woods as soon as he received his gun, but I persuaded him to devote a little time to practice. As he had the benefit of my experience, he soon became so proficient that he could hit the stones skipping over the water nearly every time.

When we went for the birds, however, he found it different, and scored several lost opportunities before he fired a shot, and at my suggestion he left the hammer at half cock, and practiced taking aim until he became somewhat accustomed to the new order of things, and in the course of a few days he was so well along that he could occasionally bring down his bird; but as he progressed in his shooting he developed a serious fault, and nearly every time he fired at a bird he would instantly let go the second barrel; no matter whether he killed or not with the first barrel, the second would instantly follow. This state of affairs continued for some time, and worried both of us not a little, for he was as sensible of the fault as I was, and tried his best to overcome it; but in spite of his best efforts the double shot would ring out, especially when he was a little excited by an unexpected rise. I have often seen him kill a bird stone dead with the first barrel, and before it had fallen a foot I would hear the second report, and in spite of the fun I poked at him and the sound ratings I gave him I could see no improvement. For some time I puzzled my brains to find a remedy, but without result, until the question settled itself one day, and, like nearly all the difficulties I had encountered, accident furnished the clew to the solution.

We were out one day, and as he had been unnecessarily burning considerable powder, I had again given him a sound rating, and he had promised to reform, and the words were scarcely out of his mouth when a bird rose and gave him a beautiful shot. As he fired but once, I began to congratulate him, when he told me that it was not his fault, for he had pulled both triggers, but owing to the loss of the left-hand hammer he had been unable to make connection. This accident instantly struck me as most providential, for here was a solution of the difficulty so easy and simple that both of us were lost in wonder that we had not caught on to the principle involved long before, for nothing could be plainer than the fact that with the hammer gone, or only one barrel available, the second shot was impossible.

Charles was very anxious to break himself of this very bad habit, and it was a long time before he would even load the left barrel, although he at once obtained a new hammer, as the gun did not seem natural, and the missing hammer rather disturbed him when trying to take a deliberate aim, although he did not notice it in quick work. After he had taken a few shots with only one barrel loaded, he was very enthusiastic over the success of the method, and claimed that the knowledge of the fact that he had but the one shot to depend upon exercised a wonderfully steadying influence upon his nerves, while at the same time he was obtaining a better as well as a quicker aim, and he was sure that in a short time he would entirely overcome his very bad habit of pulling trigger to an uncertain aim.

This wabbling the gun all around the mark and pulling by guess, I was well satisfied, was partly caused by his excited nerves, but the principal factor was the fact that he almost unconsciously, as it were, placed too much confidence in his ability to kill with the second barrel, and in consequence was both hasty and careless in using the first. Thanks to the hint given by the loss of the hammer, all this was now rapidly changing, and before the season was over he became an excellent shot when the cover was fairly open; but he never succeeded at all to his satisfaction in snap shooting, and the only reasonable explanation that I could give was that the all-important message from brain to finger tip, from some cause, did not get there on time. Perhaps there were not volts enough to give the proper amount of momentum to the current, or it may be that the wires were defective; at all events, he could not do it, and after three or four faithful trials he gave it up, thoroughly well convinced that he could not accomplish it, and as he was satisfied that this practice had a tendency to unsteady him for deliberate work, he abandoned it without much regret.

On quite a number of occasions I have met individuals who indulged in this same bad habit of using the second barrel, and when I felt well enough acquainted with them to proffer advice I have proposed that they try the method adopted by Charles, and in every instance the result was a pronounced success. In endeavoring to impart a knowledge of snap shooting, however, the result has been different; for out of the many that I have attempted to instruct only a very few have turned out to be even passably expert; but why this should be so I cannot explain, unless the reasons I have given for the failure of Charles will account for it. In view, therefore, of the many difficulties to be encountered and the improbability of success, I would not advise any one to attempt snap shooting unless there is deep down in his heart the feeling that brain and muscle, mind and eye, are in perfect harmony, and that he has love enough for the fascinating sport to patiently go through the necessary practice, and skill enough to overcome the difficulties he may encounter, and is a good wing shot. In that case I would advise him by all means to make the trial, as, even if success is beyond his reach, he will have the satisfaction of having tried it and will also derive much benefit from the practice he has had; while, on the other hand, should he become proficient in the art, he may rest assured that he would not begrudge tenfold the time and trouble expended for the satisfaction that will come to him with one successful day in the thickets among the birds. I well remember one such day, or rather part of a day, in the well-known "tangle" of thorns, briers and a miscellaneous labyrinth of witch hazel, birch and grape-vine that was situated in the midst of the famous woodcock covers in the town of Scotland, Conn.

The thorns in that cover were healthy and it was impossible to force your way through them, and in going around them you had to push through the briers, which were also vigorous; and in order to get through the briers you had to meander around the witch hazel, or crowd through, often finding yourself in a pocket of matted grape-vines which forced you to retrace your steps and try some other course. The whole combination made one of the most inviting places, to keep out of, that I have ever seen; but there were woodcock there in those days, and somehow not one of our set could resist the temptation to have a try for them whenever in this vicinity. The usual manner of procedure was for one of the party to go in with the dog, and when he made a point to give the proper signal and then wrestle with the various obstacles in his way and flush the bird, trusting to his companions, who were stationed outside, to get a shot. Upon this occasion my companions were Mr. Ethan Allin, his friend Judge Greene, of Worcester, and my friend Charles. Judge Greene had a brace of dogs and Mr. Allin had Tip, that I have previously mentioned, and when I proposed to take Tip and work out the cover there was not a dissenting voice; so they took their stations around the thicket, while Tip and I made a break into the cover. I had not visited the spot since I had be-gun snap shooting, and was very anxious to test my skill among the conglomeration of tribulations that abounded in the recesses of the well-known "tangle." In previous years I had worked the cover for my companions several times, and knew each little springhole and patch of green turf where woodcock loved to lie, and as Tip disappeared from sight I made my way to the nearest one of these places, where I found her on point. Giving my companions the proper signal, I crawled on all fours nearly in front of her, and was trying to crowd through a clump of witch hazel when the bird flushed just in front of me. I straightened partly up, and catching sight of it near the top of the birches, I cut loose and dropped it, greatly to my satisfaction. Working out the cover, I managed to keep track of Tip by sending her in the direction of the good places, and then going as nearly as I could to them, I would find her on point, and taking pains to obtain as open ground as was possible, I succeeded in getting eleven shots at the fourteen birds we found, and only missed two of them, while my companions accounted for all the others.

When I finally broke cover and we were all together, I took the birds from my pockets and received quite an ovation, as all were greatly surprised at my success. The Judge said that it was a wonderful performance, and told me that when I heard persons brag of their shooting to tell them that I killed nine out of eleven shots in the "tangle," adding that this would dispose of their case without further argument. To say that I was happy does not express it, I was fairly intoxicated with pleasure, and although nearly a half century has passed, my pulse still quickly throbs as I review the incidents of that memorable day, and I still think that, taking everything into consideration, this was the very best bit of shooting that I have ever done. I do not record this boastingly, but merely to illustrate the fact that persevering effort, when successful, insures ample reward.

Snap shooting over open ground, or in cover that is not very dense, does not possess the charm that attends the practice in the tangled thicket. Probably, knowledge of the fact that it is not necessary has something to do with this, as that knowledge interferes with the bracing up of the nerves so imperative to the success of this style of shooting, but the principal objection is the lack of success. I have met quite a number of good snap shots, but have yet to see the one who could repeat in the open his performance in the thicket, and it is mainly for this reason that I strongly advise that the practice be strictly confined to its legitimate place, the dense cover. I once, however, met with a notable exception to this rule, or rather a case where the rule was reversed, for while the individual was the quickest as well as one of the surest shots in the open, he could do nothing in cover.

My friend, Mr. J. M. Cannon, one of the lumber kings of the West, and myself were shooting chickens near Davenport, Ia., when we saw this man some distance away also hunting chickens, but without a dog. Mr. Cannon was acquainted with him, and proposed that we go over and invite him to join us, adding that he thought he could show me something in the way of shooting that would please me. Thankfully accepting our invitation, he informed us that there was a scattered covey near us that he had been unable to find, and the dogs were at once sent on, and in a short time both of them were on point. As we went to them our friend was given the post of honor, while we took position on each flank. Now I was a quick shot, even in the open, and had seen others do good work in this line, but this man fairly took my breath away. As Mr. Cannon well expressed it, he was more than sudden, for his birds were not fairly out of the grass before they were doubled up, and so well did he shoot that it was seldom he scored a miss.

After we had worked out the open prairie for a couple of hours, and had lots of shooting, Mr. Cannon proposed that we beat out an extensive cornfield, into which we had driven a large number of birds, and we at once started toward it. I could see that our friend did not quite like this arrangement, but he said nothing, and we entered the corn abreast and about a gunshot apart, with our friend in the center. Mr. Cannon and I were at home here, as we could both do excellent work in corn, and we were soon dropping them right and left; but our "sudden" friend was out of his element, and after several shots with only two or three birds to show for them he gave it up, saying that he never could shoot in corn. I was greatly surprised, as, until I witnessed his failure, I had supposed that this was just the place to bring out to perfection the wonderful skill he had displayed in the open, and this reversal of the usual order of things bothered me not a little, especially when I learned upon inquiry that his failure was not owing to lack of practice, as he told me that he had persistently tried to get there, but somehow he could not do it.

I ruminated over this for several days, but could not arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, until one day, when shooting in corn, a bird rose in front of me, and as I pitched the gun into position the bird swerved to the right and disappeared from sight behind the dense growth. Although it did not go three feet before I again caught sight of it, and I at once pulled trigger, I missed it clean. I did not regret the miss, as, at the very instant I had pulled to what I instinctively knew would be a miss, it flashed into my mind that here was the solution of the problem that had so bothered me in relation to the shooting of our "sudden" friend. His nerves were keyed up to just the right tension to do their proper work the very fraction of the instant that the music of the fluttering wings in the grass vibrated along the sensitive strings; but when, from any cause, there was even an infinitesimal break in the connection, those nerves collapsed and could not recover their proper form quickly enough to accomplish their mission on time. On the open prairie, when his nerves responded to the call of the slightest rustle in the grass, the gun was mechanically pitched to his shoulder; his eye, unobstructed, found the bird; the connection was complete and everything worked in harmony. But in the corn the surroundings were entirely different; some little time elapsed after these nerves were ready before the eye could make the circuit complete by sighting the bird, and owing to the delay the collapse came, and when the time for action arrived the sensitive tissues had not fully recovered and hence their work was bunglingly performed.

This was undoubtedly the true solution in this case, and I have no doubt that very many unaccountable misses are sorely due to this cause, for I well know that in my own case when my nerves are short of training they often play me tricks and throw me off, just as I pull, from some little cause that does not disturb them in the least when I have them well in hand by proper practice.

Chicken shooting in August and September is very fascinating to the beginner, especially when his skill in bringing down grouse and woodcock is not quite up to the standard; for there is no shooting so easy as this, and the young sportsman who has steady nerves can soon bring down his bird at nearly every shot, as at this season the birds lie well to the dog, and their moderate rate of speed and straightaway course render them an easy mark. I know of no better practice than this for giving confidence to the man who lacks this most essential quality, either regarding his ability or the shooting power of his gun.

Sport on the open prairie soon palls from its sameness, unless you are in the vicinity of wet sloughs, ponds or streams, in which case you will occasionally obtain a shot at the different varieties of ducks, as well as at other birds that frequent these localities, which will give you a diversity of sport that is far more satisfactory than the constant pursuit of any one kind of game. The beginner often finds, when he changes from one species of game bird to some other, that his shooting is very unsatisfactory. This is especially the case when he gets among the ducks or snipe, and I have seen many, who were excellent shots both in cover and open shooting, make a sad mess of it upon their first introduction to these swift and erratic flying birds.

I well remember my first experience with the snipe. I was shooting woodcock near Moose Meadow in the town of Willington, Conn., and was crossing open ground, when my dog ran ahead to a little pool of water, and as he plunged into it a couple of snipe rose a few yards beyond and settled not more than twenty yards to my right. Now I knew all about snipe, just how to hunt them and just how to shoot them, for I had read all about it in the books, and as these were the first that I had seen I blessed my lucky stars and at once proceeded to bring them to bag in the orthodox manner. But when I walked them up and confidently pulled on the first one, he somehow twisted away from the charge, and as I covered the other one I took extra pains to pull at just the proper time; but the result was the same, and I did not even frighten either bird, for after a short flight they again settled, and I proceeded to load and go for them with renewed hope.

After I had taken four shots at each bird they began to get a little wild and no longer kept together. This arrangement suited me, as I now had only one at a time, and I at once determined to summarily end the matter, as I had become deeply interested, and was not a little vexed to think that I could not use my thorough knowledge of the business to better advantage. So with an extra firm grip on the gun and well braced nerves I went for the nearest one, and when he rose I gave him a snap shot that struck me very forcibly as being at least two feet out of the way, but to my great surprise the bird fell stone dead. Thinking that perhaps I had in some manner unknown to me followed the course laid down in the books for such cases, I pondered over the matter for some time, but could come to no satisfactory conclusion. All that I could make of it was that, according to my best belief, I had blundered in my shooting so far as a correct aim was concerned; but as the bird was killed clean, and examination plainly showed that it was hard hit, I could only believe that it had also blundered, or else deliberately dodged into the charge in order to escape my relentless pursuit.

Following up the remaining bird, it rose some distance to my right and flew nearly squarely across in front, giving me a fair shot, and I had no trouble in bringing it down. My experience with these two birds made a strong impression upon my mind, and the more I thought it over the more eager was I to have another trial at them, but did not have opportunity until I went West.

I was in Iowa, making my way to a duck pass between two small ponds, when a snipe jumped from under my feet, and no sooner did I see it than I determined to settle the question that had so bothered me, if it took all my ammunition. I brought the gun into position when the bird was the proper distance away, and sighting it over the barrels I killed it stone dead. Soon after I flushed another, and killed it also without any trouble, and the vexed question was settled and all was plain. In shooting at the birds on Moose Meadow I was too eager, and had invariably fired too quickly, as the birds were twisting and dodging, as they nearly always do when they first rise; but the birds I had just killed had risen so near to me that I was forced to wait for them to get away the proper distance, and they had then got straightened on their course, or at least their erratic motions were not quite so abrupt, and there was sufficient time between the curves to render them comparatively easy shooting. This solution of the matter was the correct one, in my case at least, for I afterward demonstrated it to my satisfaction among some wild birds, although after a little practice I became fairly proficient in snap-shooting them.

I had very little trouble in hitting the ducks, as I had had considerable practice in dove shooting, and had learned to swing my gun at the requisite speed so necessary to success when shooting at fast-flying birds. I have never met with very brilliant success in snap shooting at ducks when in full flight, but when I could jump them from the wild rice or other cover I could do very satisfactory work in this style of shooting. The trouble in my case with the birds in full flight was that there was a great variation in the rate of speed of the different birds, and a shot that would kill a moderate flying bird would be from one to six feet behind a faster one. I have no doubt that a proper amount of practice would have brought success, as I have met several duck shooters in the West and on the coast who were excellent snap shots, but as a rule the successful duck shot gets on the bird and follows it until he has the proper swing. When among young and unsophisticated birds on a calm day the moderate shot will often give a very good account of himself, but when the birds are waywise or a gale is blowing it takes good powder, a good gun, and above all else a good man, to stop them.

For many years there has been a sharp controversy among duck shooters as to the best method of shooting, and the sportsmen's papers have been time after time filled with the arguments of the "hold ahead" and "hold on" theories; but so far as I have been able to learn, not a single convert has been made from either side. The simple solution of this is that sufficient practice at either method will enable nearly any one who is capable of learning to shoot to do good work, and as a rule the shooter will adopt the method that comes easiest and most natural for him, even against strong predilection in favor of other method. This is as it should be, for in settling all questions of this nature the individual shooter should invariably be a law unto himself, following no precedent and accepting no man's dictum until he has demonstrated that the precedent applies to his case, or the advice is sound and fitted to the conditions connected with the point in question from his standpoint. Precedent and advice which are just right in every respect and most decidedly proper for one individual may be entirely wrong and ill-advised in the case of another.

I have met many excellent shots who shot from the left shoulder, but it would be preposterous for me to advise every one to adopt this method. I may, however, without stultifying myself, advise the man who finds this method the better by all means to adopt it. In all of the many questions of like nature that confront the beginner there is only one safe course to pursue, and only one safe rule that should govern, and that is simply to prove all things and hold fast the good; that is, hold fast all that is good for him when he has demonstrated by actual test or experiment that it is really good. No matter what others may advise in relation to gun, ammunition, manner of loading, style of handling, or method of shooting, take nothing for granted, and make no changes until you have proven by exhaustive test that the advice is suited to your individual requirements and that you will be the gainer by following it.

Of course, in all matters pertaining to the etiquette of the field or the science of woodcraft you cannot do better than to seek and follow the advice and counsel of those who are qualified by nature and experience to point out to you the proper course, taking the utmost care when choosing your mentor to see that you make no mistake in the selection, as it will be far better for you to trust to your own resources than to follow in the footsteps of a blind leader, especially if his eyes are willfully closed. Many men with considerable experience in the field appear to have the whole business down fine—if one may judge from their talk—but very unfortunately for the enjoyment of their companions their talk is the only indication that they possess the slightest knowledge of the fundamental rules that should govern the conduct of the gentleman at all times, and especially when with companions he seeks for pleasure among the sports of the field. There are also, I am very pleased to say, many other men, with more or less experience, who never mention it, but long before the day is over their seemingly involuntary observance of these rules—even to the most unimportant—together with their unobtrusive performance of the many little courtesies that enhance the pleasure of their companions, show them to be of the right sort—a correct pattern and worthy guide for the young or inexperienced sportsman to emulate and follow.

Practice at dove shooting I found to be of great assistance to me when I came to try the ducks, as

I have already mentioned, but it was a long time—and much ammunition was expended—before I became even a passable shot at the fast-flying doves. The main reason for my failure was that I began practice at them too soon, as they were plentiful and I could shoot them in the summer, when there was nothing else for me to practice on. For this reason I tried them before I could do anything like good work on game birds; but after I had become a fairly good shot in cover I found it much easier to hold on to the doves, and I have had a great deal of sport with them. There is no bird that flies that will so tax the skill of the shooter as a full-grown, well-furnished dove on a windy day, and I have seen more than one crack shot get badly left by these scorchers, even when there was no wind to blame it to.

I was once plover shooting on the Granby Plains, some ten miles from my home, with my friend Fred Eaton, of Worcester, Mass., one of the best companions and I think the very best shot that I have ever met in our rough New England shooting. We found few plover, and, as quite a breeze was blowing, we could do nothing with them; so I proposed that we visit a certain corner where I had often had sport with the doves, and we were soon stationed about sixty yards apart upon opposite sides of the little open space over which the doves passed on their way to water some two hundred yards beyond. As they were coming down wind, the prospect for some lively work was quite encouraging, and we had scarcely taken position before the ball opened with a scorcher that passed Eaton like a flash, giving him a fair shot; but he did not shoot, nor even bring up his gun, saying that he did not think it sportsmanlike to add to the terror of a bird that appeared to be already about as frightened as it was possible for any bird to be. But when the next one came along at about the same gait he swung for it in capital form, but, greatly to his surprise and disgust, the bird kept on without the slightest indication that there was anything out of the way. Soon after another one came and the performance was repeated.

I could plainly see by the quick jerk of his head and the vim with which he snapped his gun together that he was beginning to take considerable interest in the proceedings, and as there was a pair of them coming he settled himself in position and pulled for the first one, but missed it, when the rear bird, frightened by the whistle of the charge in front of him, swerved to one side, but the second barrel rang out and it dropped like a stone. "There!" said Eaton, "I have got on to them; all that is needed is to shoot ahead of them, and when they stop and hold still just let them have it, and there you are." He then wanted me to miss a few, as he put it, in order that he might get some satisfaction out of it; so I returned to my stand, and, as I was pretty well braced up, I let down a couple of them in good style, when he nodded his head, and taking a good grip on his gun he partly turned his back to a bird that was coming, and as it passed him he pitched the gun to his shoulder, and getting the proper swing he cut loose and tumbled it.

After this he did fairly well, killing about half his birds; but he was far from satisfied, and readily accepted my invitation to stay one more day and have another turn at them. The next morning we drove to a small rye stubble, where they were feeding, and placing him on a stump in the center of the field, with a leafy bush stuck beside him to shade him from the sun and hide him from the birds, I went to a large stubble a quarter of a mile away and devoted my time to walking up the birds and driving them to him. I obtained only a few shots, but heard frequently from him, and when I joined him two hours later he had about twenty birds, and had scored only two or three misses, making a record that any one might well feel proud of, and one that I have never seen equaled by a new hand, even when he was an excellent shot at other birds.

I once persuaded my friend and shooting companion Sabin to accompany me upon an expedition for doves; but after he had missed a few shots he refused to have any further dealings with them. Sabin was one of the surest shots at our upland game that I ever met, and I do not think that his average shooting would show three misses to the hundred shots; but he thought everything of his reputation as a sure shot and would take no shot that he had the least doubt about, and I have often seen him take his gun from his shoulder and refuse a fair shot because he did not succeed in getting on just to suit him. Many times have I seen a moderate shot, who would take all chances and miss more than half his birds, outscore him three to one.

I shot with Mr. Sabin many times each season for a good many years, and always found him to be an excellent companion, well up in the science of woodcraft, thoroughly posted as to the habits of the different game birds, and, best of all, he was always a gentleman, and appeared to take more pleasure in ministering to the enjoyment of his companion than almost any one I have ever met. Often have I known him to devote the entire day to some inexperienced friend, giving him every shot he possibly could, and at every miss inventing some plausible excuse, while every successful shot would receive unstinted praise, making for the novice a day of unalloyed pleasure long to be remembered.

I was once shooting with Sabin over some favorite covers in South Coventry, Conn., when we met two gentlemen who were also shooting. After mutual introduction and a few minutes' conversation we found that they were entirely ignorant of the grounds, and had been working out covers that we knew from experience were barren. This touched us both in a tender spot, but Sabin was unusually affected, and proposed that they join us, adding that we were perfectly acquainted with the whole country and would be pleased to show them some sport. Thankfully accepting our invitation, we started for the big swamp a short distance away, the very best grouse cover in the whole region.

When we arrived at the head of the swamp, at the suggestion of Sabin we paired off, he taking charge of one of the strangers, while the other went with me, and turning in opposite directions we started on our course around the swamp to meet at the lower end. I found my companion to be a good fellow as well as a capital shot, and although he protested I forced him to take a large share of the shots; and when we met the other party we had a goodly number of birds to show; but poor Sabin was heart-broken; not a single bird had they found, and he looked the picture of despair, not on his own account, however, as such things never disturbed him unless, as in the present case, he wished to show his companion some sport.

At the end of the swamp where we met there were two alder runs that made a circuit of some four or five hundred yards, coming nearly together again. Sabin and his companion went to the left, while my companion and I took the other. We had gone but a short distance when both dogs pointed near the edge of the run, and I proposed that we drive the bird to the other party and give them a shot if possible. This met the views of my companion; so I signaled them that we had a point; and as they were in plain sight, not more than a hundred yards away, I showed them by waving my gun that we would send the bird in their direction. Then we went around the dogs and flushed the grouse, which flew nearly straight to them. I was intently watching the stranger to see what he would do with the scorcher, but did not have long to wait, for that bird was just humming, and was soon opposite them, when the stranger with a quick motion brought his gun to his shoulder, took aim, and then spasmodically jerked the gun ahead and pulled trigger, killing his bird stone dead.

This style of shooting was entirely new to me, and excited no little interest, and I questioned my companion regarding it and learned that this was his usual manner of shooting, having learned it among the ducks, where, my companion informed me, "he was a holy terror," which I had no doubt was the case when I afterward saw him bring down several grouse and quail, with never a miss when the birds were at speed; but he could do nothing with a bird flushed too near to get under good headway before he fired. Indeed he frankly acknowledged that a slow bird nearly always had the best of it; and he also told me that straightaway or quartering shots gave him no end of trouble, and that he only felt perfectly at home when the birds were crossing at speed squarely in front of him. This man learned to shoot from a point where nearly every shot was of this description, and I learned from him that he had no other shooting for several years, and had become so accustomed to the method that he did not think it advisable to attempt a change; but when he saw me tumble three grouse in succession in a dense thicket that I had gone through at the suggestion of Sabin, he most emphatically announced his intention to become a snap shot, if it were possible, and begged me to point out the way, which I did pretty much as I have done in this work.

I saw no more of him for two years, when I met him on the coast at Manumit Point, where I had gone for a try at the ducks. We arrived at the point long before daybreak, but the line of boats was already much further out to sea than we cared to go; so we took our station about one hundred yards below the line, between the fourth and fifth boats, trusting the matter entirely to our friend and guide, the veteran Hoxie, and the result proved that he knew what he was about; for, with the exception of the two boats above us, we had more shooting than any other craft. There was a man in the fifth boat that I at once saw was a snap shot, and a good one; and I watched him, thoroughly enjoying myself, as I always do when contemplating the work of an artist. I was not the only one who enjoyed his shooting, for many times hearty cheers rang out when he deftly stopped a fast-flying bird, and several times he received quite an ovation.

When the morning flight was nearly over, he took the oars, while his companion unmoored the boat, which dropped down with the tide until opposite us, when with a wild halloo he backed water and swung his boat alongside. As he came up I recognized the two gentlemen I had met in South Coventry two years before. When he was within arm's length he grabbed me, and with a hug that convinced me of his sincerity he poured forth a perfect torrent of thanks for the service I had rendered him, and showered words of praise upon me that fairly made me blush.

After he had somewhat cooled off, we returned to the shore, when he informed me that he had implicitly followed my instructions until he could do very good work at the stones skipping on the water, when he had gone to the scrub oak covers of southern Virginia and taken lots of practice at the quail; but was not satisfied with the result, although he could usually bring down more than half of his birds. He then went to his favorite duck point on the Chesapeake, when he found that he could shoot better than he had previously done, and, he added, "better than all the rest, my friends no longer poke fun at me for the style in which I get on to my birds."

Now this man was a natural snap shot, and it is perhaps needless to say that I arrogated to myself no credit for his remarkable skill, although I did feel a pardonable pride in having pointed out to him the path to success. Six months later I received a letter from him, in which he stated that he had fallen in love with the clay pigeon for summer practice, and requested me to give him some points on trap-shooting in general, as well as those that would cover his particular case. This was rather a poser. I had taken quite a little practice at the trap, but the whir of the senseless clay failed to interest me, and I was far from fond of it. So I wrote him that I did not feel competent to advise an expert, but would suggest that he procure a trap and a boy to trap and pull, with no one else near, trusting to practice and his own good sense to bring him out all right. Some six weeks later I received from him a copy of a paper containing trap scores, and as several of the highest were opposite his name it is to be presumed that he got there; but I never learned whether he practiced snap shooting at the trap or adopted some other style.

Trap-shooting is excellent practice for the beginner while he is learning to manipulate his gun and taking his first lessons in shooting at a moving target. I should have mentioned it when advising that tin cans be thrown, but I thought it best to say nothing of the trap, as probably a very large majority of beginners will find it to be inconvenient, if not impossible, to obtain this practice without more trouble or expense than they care to incur, and I have therefore advised a course that would be within the reach of all, instead of one that might be beyond the reach or purse of any one. But when opportunity serves, and the expense will not incommode the beginner, I would advise practice at the trap until he is ready to test his skill among the birds. When actual work in the field begins, there should be no more practice at the trap until he has become reasonably expert in bringing down his birds, when the practice may be resumed if thought best.

The reason for this advice is that the flight of the clay pigeon and a startled bird are so entirely different that the beginner, in changing from one to the other, is very prone to make mistakes, and as a result his shooting becomes erratic and unsatisfactory. The inanimate target invariably begins to slow up the instant it leaves the trap, while on the contrary the bird flies with a constantly increasing momentum until it is some distance away and has attained its regular rate of speed. As I have previously said, the beginner has all that he can attend to when trying to get on his birds, and he should refrain from performing any act or even thinking of anything that may possibly disturb him and cause him to hesitate or do anything he should not do at a critical moment. It is for this reason that I strongly advise him to bestow his undivided attention upon the particular method of practice he may be following until he is reasonably expert at it. Especially should he do this when he begins with the birds, reserving all other practice until he is satisfied that he is so well grounded in this that the change will not throw him off.

I have on many occasions been afield with good trap shots on their first introduction to the birds, and in several instances have seen them do good work. But the woods are full of those who have learned to shoot at the trap that make a sad mess of it in the cover. The former were natural shots, with steady nerves, and only little practice was required to enable them to bring down their birds. The trouble with a large portion of the others is that in learning to shoot at the trap they have gotten into a rut and cannot get out. In other words, they shoot at their birds just as they do at the clay pigeons, taking no account of the many entirely different conditions that exist, but go on from day to day blazing away in the same stupid manner, and are lost in wonder that they do not kill their birds. Let us sincerely hope that you are not one of this class; but if the coat fits you take it off at once, secure the service of a boy, go to the nearest sheet of water and perseveringly practice at the stones skipping on the water, as previously described, until you have mastered the secret and can hit them nearly every time, and have perfect confidence in yourself. Then go for the birds, and my word for it, if you have reasonably steady nerves, and possess the wit to quickly see and take advantage of what may come to you in the way of opportunity or accident, your only wonder will be why you did not in some way sooner get out of that blindly followed rut.

I was once quail shooting in North Carolina, when I was invited by a friend to go out with him and a noted trap shot, who, he said, would undoubtedly show us some good shooting. When my dog found a bevy I gave the trap shot the post of honor and went around the small thicket and flushed the birds. He brought down a straightaway, and then tried for one that was crossing in front, and missed it. Gazing with a surprised look at the bird until it was out of sight, then critically examining his gun, he turned to us with a blank look, most comical to see, and with a dubious shake of his head, as though he could not understand it, reloaded his gun, and without a word started with us for the birds, which had settled in a fairly open place. When we found them I gave him a good position and drove a bird quartering past him, which he missed, and within the next five minutes I sent him three more, all of which kept right on in spite of his very best efforts to stop them. This man was a first-class shot at the trap, but had never before tried the quail; he was also a jolly good fellow, with wit enough to know when he was worsted, and sense enough to take the shortest cut out of difficulty, which he did in this case by treating the whole performance as a capital joke, and enjoying with us a hearty laugh, and then appealing to us for instructions as to what to do.

Advising him to leave both hammers down, and to be sure to obtain a perfect aim at each bird that rose, my friend and I went for the birds, and left him to follow us and practice his lesson. After more than an hour of this I saw by the satisfied manner in which he nodded his head, after taking aim at a bird that was twisting around the pines, that he had somewhat recovered his confidence, and soon after he tumbled a crossing bird in good style, and from this on until night he brought down nearly twenty birds, with only a few misses. He thus conclusively proved to us that he was not only a good shot, but that he was possessed of good judgment as well as good sense enough to enable him to quickly adapt himself to changed conditions, and patience enough to bide his time until the path to success was clear from obstructions. In other words, he plainly saw that the rut I have mentioned would not lead to success among the quail, and he abandoned it at once and adopted a method that brought him out of his difficulty.

I have often met sportsmen who were excellent shots at one particular variety of game, while with other varieties their shooting was far from being satisfactory. This was owing in many instances to the fact that nearly all their practice was confined to the bird in question, and the rut that they followed, while well enough for this particular variety, was not proper for others.

I must confess that I have had no end of trouble in trying to correct this fault in my own shooting.

My favorite bird has always been the ruffed grouse, and I have probably devoted more time to the pursuit of this royal bird than I have to that of all others combined.

There is a fascination in this sport that brings me more of pleasure and satisfaction than does the pursuit of any other bird. I have probably killed more than twice as many woodcock and several times as many quail as I have ruffed grouse; but somehow I have always been a much surer shot at the grouse, and my per cent. of misses at this bird is much less than it is with either of the others. There is something in the music of the beating pinions of my favorite bird that sends the blood more swiftly coursing through my veins, and keys up my nerves to a greater tension than ever comes from fluttering rise of aristocratic woodcock, or tumultuous rush of gamy quail.

My best shooting is done with nerves thus keyed up, which will account for the better work on grouse, although I could nearly always do well on other birds when I kept my head. But the great trouble with me is that when grouse get into my head I shoot for them when other birds get up, and consequently score many a miss that I would not were it not for this fault. With quail in cover it does not matter so much, as their flight is very similar to that of the grouse; but with the woodcock it is different, as they fly slower and often with much more erratic flight. I do not remember that I ever mistook the rise of a grouse for that of any other bird, and I have tried faithfully to so school myself that mistakes of this nature should not occur; but, as I have before stated, my nerves sometimes play me tricks, and this appears to be a favorite one with them.

It is only in snap shooting, however, that I make such mistakes, for in open shooting the work is more deliberate, and I have time to straighten out and correct the action of the impulsive nerves. I was once invited by a farmer friend to go to his house, when he would show me a new woodcock cover that he had just found. I made him an early visit and we started for the cover, which was a piece of sprout land that had been cleared two or three years, and was covered with a young growth that was from eight to twelve feet in height and rather dense.

On our way to the place was an alder swamp, and we looked into it for grouse, as it was a favorite place for them. We had gone only a short distance when my dog pointed, and I flushed a large covey and killed a brace. Following up the birds, I killed fourteen more, making sixteen in all without a miss. We then went to the woodcock cover, where we found an abundance of birds, and I had more than twenty shots, but could show only seven birds for them, greatly to my disgust and much to the amusement of my friend. A few days later I again visited the place and scored thirteen birds, with only two misses. The trouble upon my first visit was that the grouse fever had complete possession of me, and, in spite of all I could do, the gun would go off too soon to stop the slower flying birds, for I well remember that I only killed the straightaway birds, and missed every one that went at a different angle.

I have in these pages endeavored to describe the methods that a large and varied experience of more than a half century have taught me to believe best adapted to the needs of those who are about to try to acquire the art of shooting on the wing. I have also endeavored to outline the course of conduct that I know will bring to the sportsman, as well as to the companion of his days afield, most satisfactory pleasure; and I lay aside my pen confident in the belief that some at least of the many young sportsmen who join the ranks each year will find in these pages something that will be of service to them in their endeavor to master the mysteries of this fascinating art.

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